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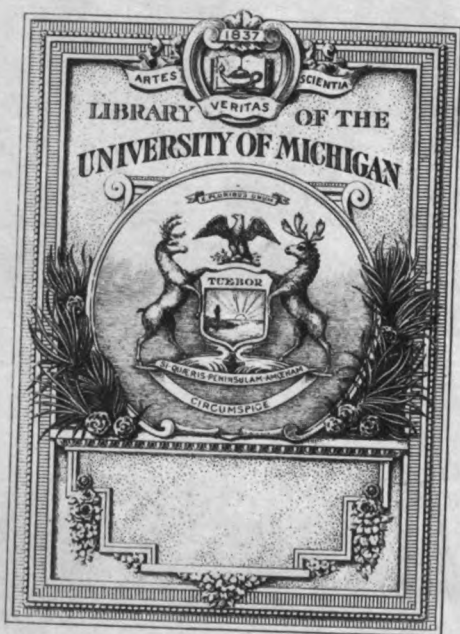
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THE HAPPY HIGHWAYS

BY
STORM JAMESON

*Into my heart an air that kills
From yon far country blows:
What are those blue remembered hills,
What spires, what farms are those?*

*That is the land of lost content,
I see it shining plain,
The happy highways where I went
And cannot come again.*

From "A Shropshire Lad"
By A. E. Housman.



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CONTENTS

	PAGE
BOOK I — IRRESPONSIBILITY	1
BOOK II — THE EIKONOKLASTS: A SCHEME	125
BOOK III — CHAOS	203

BOOK I
IRRESPONSIBILITY

THE HAPPY HIGHWAYS

CHAPTER I

I HAVE made three beginnings to my book. Each morning of the past week I have taken myself and my papers to the side of the beck and tried to make order from the headlong memories. I meant this to be a book of youth, and I tried first to put into words the quality of days when thoughts stir and whisper along the mind from old unfathomable memories, and the leashed blood strains and leaps in an ecstasy older and more cunning than the eldest speech. The wind blew my papers over the green shoots of the daffodils, and as I lay face downwards on the cool earth there came only the brave unforgotten colors of the past. . . .

The moor road twists and climbs between stark trees, and at the foot of the last slope the boy broke into a run. He reached the top and stood mute. Below him the red roofs and narrow streets of the town went down to the edge of the bay. The risen sun had passed behind low-hung clouds: its rays poured down and rimmed the waiting sea with silver. And as he watched, there came across the waters a glory that he could hardly bear. . . .

Now I remember the nightly journeys from school in the train that rushed and rocked along the cliffs. There came a point in the journey when the lights of the valley leaped out of the darkness and stirred in me such a passion of formless desires and wild, inarticulate ambition that I held my breath in something liker pain than pleasure. The train sweeps round the corner, and the little town, sunk in the enchanted night, has fled back into the darkness. . . .

I set myself to write of the last days in those trenches I shall not see again. I failed once more—a curious failure. For three days after they told me I had lost my sight, I was afraid to think. I lay in bed, trying to get out of my head that image of a dark curtain, dropped between me and the life I hungered

for. I was desperately afraid that I should begin to tear at it with my hands, struggle, rave . . . I am twenty-seven, and I loved the things of the earth.

And on the fourth morning I woke to find myself at the other side of the curtain. That is the only way I can get into words the sense of lightness and freedom that came to me. I had no illusions. I knew that my sight was gone for good, and yet I was suddenly and strangely freed of an intolerable burden. The blood, the squalor, the things I had suffered, all the sights and sounds of the war were gone from my mind. I was free of them. I laughed aloud. The gods that had taken my eyes had given me back the heart of a child. . . .

There was something almost tangible in my happiness. I thought about it, fingered it, feared to lose it. My waking thoughts were always of it. I had a forlorn dread of the curtain that had dropped behind me, a dread that did not leave me for many weeks. It faded in its turn. I stood on hills I had known and half forgotten, and drew again from the fresh, inexhaustible sources of my life. In my black hours, in my moments of savage revulsion and regret, I am held above the wrecking madness of despair. I know that there are men for whom the curtain has not lifted. There was young Gladding: he got shrapnel in his face: I helped to carry him to the dressing station. I found out the other day that he had shot himself. He was a pretty little fool, and he had been proud of his good looks. God rest his soul: the war is unkind to pretty fools who have not the merit of high birth.

Thus it comes about that I can no more write of the war than of a life I have never known. During the last week I have had here two men: one who will not go back to France for many months, and an airman who is on his way now. The first man is suffering from shell-shock. He sat in my quiet room and talked almost without ceasing. At times the hurried, eager voice rose until it filled the room. "You remember the trenches in that first winter," he said — "no, of course you don't; you men that went out in 'fifteen don't know anything about war. Mud! There has never been mud like that in 'fourteen. You could n't walk along the communication trenches. When you were re-

lieved you crawled along the top of the trench. The men fell into shell holes in the dark. You had to leave them there. If a man went back to help he fell in and the mud got him too. I still hear them screaming for help. It's a funny thing, you know, but they always called for their mothers when they were nearly gone. You'd think that was all cant, wouldn't you? But it is n't, you know. I heard 'em. Screaming in the dark. 'Mother — oh, God — mother, mother!'" He shouted with laughter at the memory, catching his breath and trying to talk as he shook and rocked in his chair.

The airman talked as much, but in a different way. He was naïvely sure of my interest in the details of his adventures, and he had a trick of vivid narrative. "Everything below was a great black slate"—he was observing a battery at night—"with tongues of flame licking at the darkness." I imagined him sweeping his hand at the rushing shadows.

I heard both these men with the same sense that I was listening to tales of an alien world. I had no part or lot with them.

CHAPTER II

THERE is no war in my world. It is the world in which I lived in 1910, only a little wiser, a little less assured, more insistent in its needs, more articulate in its desires.

We were students then — at the college in the Strand — four men and a girl, sharing rooms in Herne Hall, walking every morning over Denmark Hill to catch the Chalk Farm 'bus to town, quarreling, arguing, working, and intent on seeing life with an earnestness that defeated its own ends. Michael, Oliver and I are brothers: Margaret was our friend at school. Anthony Calvert we had met first at college and gathered into the clan.

We wanted our ideas on life to be ordered and spacious and truthful after the best models. We were very severe on what Mick called the healthy-minded, who are so wrapped round in irrational satisfaction with things as they seem, that they never by any chance see through their impenetrable ignorance to the struggling, incalculable thing that is life. How much superior our own disinterested understanding!

We waxed mightily hot in that room hung above the gray quadrangle of King's. These were the days when the Scheme was hovering just outside the circle of our consciousness, waiting for the words that should discover and draw it in. We sat in the dark round a vast fire, and the warm glow flung sharp lights and shadows on the faces of the men. My thoughts of the social struggle are inextricably mixed up with that warm shadowed room and the plunge into the chequered radiance of the Strand. After one of these gatherings we were filled with exhilaration as we pushed our way along the crowded pavement.

We looked eagerly into the faces of the men and women whose souls we meant snatching, willy-nilly, from a strangling civilization. The exhilaration lasted while we stood on Waterloo Bridge and looked from the dappled water to the brooding spaces of

the sky: but always as we went on it slipped from us, and in the exhausted squalor of Walworth Road left us naked and ashamed.

With these memories come others — of the darkened byways, the little cafés and eating-houses that took hold on our affections. We were always very poor: the Trocadero stood for us on unattainable and shining heights. I remember now the shock of disappointment with which I looked round when I went there for the first time, a subaltern on leave, my pockets full of good money. In those other days we sought out small cafés in side streets. There was the little eating-house in Greek Street with the Italian name and the Russian proprietor. Deluded into believing that we were Nihilists, he let us have his inner room for hours every evening, until one day we found the place stripped bare and deserted, vanished in the night. There was Biucchi's in Brixton, where Margaret and I once sat at midnight and ate roast chicken that we could not afford. And in Richmond was a café where they took a shilling and set no limit to appetite. It was frequented by lovers who hungered for the food of the gods and ate nought else, but the system broke down when we came.

Once we gave ourselves a dinner in the private room of another Soho café. We chose it for its name, and I have forgotten it. Margaret sat at the head of the table in a thin black dinner gown. Her gaiety topped ours: there was about her a lift and surge of excitement that flooded up in her voice and gestures from a hidden source. We had with us two guests we had not seen before that night and never saw again. One was a poet. Oliver had found him wandering round Drury Lane, singing for his supper. Mick brought the other. His guest was an old shrunken man. He had stopped Mick in the Strand when Mick was hurrying to the dinner.

"Honest to goodness," Mick told him, "I have n't a penny in the world." He turned out his pockets for all the world to see. "You 'd better come and have some dinner."

The old wretch came. He ate and drank, and a change took place in him. His cheeks filled out and his eyes gleamed in their narrowed sockets. He began to talk in a voice like the roar of a 'cello.

"Once I was young," said he; "I had a little sweetheart. She 'd bright blue eyes and golden hair."

"Her eyes were tawny and her face was pale," the poet interrupted drowsily.

"Go to, thou old eater of life, I tell you her eyes were blue — blue as the sky above — and her hair was the color of the corn beneath. We lay on the grass and the warm earth lived through us. Now she is ugly and withered and hateful in my sight. I tread stones instead of grass, and the earth will be cold when I lie on it next. I came to London in the spring. The rain had washed the streets. The sun shone on the roofs of the houses, on the bridles of the prancing horses, on the yellow flowers in the windows. It glittered on the little pools and they vanished like Semele. The motor-cars went by in a flash of light. The people walked on light feet, exhilarated by the life whirling past them in the sunshine."

The poet was writing quatrains on the gray wall-paper. He wrote —

Even as a dead leaf in the autumn eve,
The lifetime of a man soon drifts away.
Full soon the vesper bells call us to grieve,
And two and two the people go to pray.

The old man nodded his head.

"Quite right," he murmured. "She wears a little cotton glove and you share her hymn-book. The sheep are nibbling at the graves outside, and one goes pattering across the flagstones like a mincing lady in high shoes. The scent of meadow-sweet comes through the open window, and the choir sings — The da-ay thou ga-avest, Lo-ord ——"

Yet still alone, and wandering o'er the earth,
Steeped in the wind, the sky, the sun and sea,
I sing in wayward, solitary mirth,
The songs of things as they seem good to me.

"You lie!" the other roared. "You were never steeped in anything but drink. You never see the sky for the electric sky signs. You never wandered in your life but between Battersea

and Bow. You never stood on a cliff and hugged the wind to your body. You old stealer of youth! You trader of youth for a rotten sonnet!"

Mick was staring at his guest in whimsical perplexity.

"What is youth?" he asked. "When one is old, what is youth?"

The poet opened his mouth to answer, but the old man pushed him back against the wall.

"Youth is wine to be poured away. Youth is the old heady wine of the earth. Youth is the chalice whereinto the earth empties herself. . . ."

Margaret laughed suddenly, and said in her high clear voice that it was really much simpler than that to be young. Her laugh pricked the old maniac's excitement. He sat down and picked with his fingers at the tablecloth.

I do not remember much about the dinner, except that we talked, laughing and quoting poetry, until the short summer night slipped under the wings of the dawn. It was an impatient dawn, beating against the fiery ribs of the east. We set off towards it down the road as lightly as if we had behind us a night of sleep and not a night spent talking nonsense over candles guttering out on a disordered dinner-table. There were houses on either side of us, and frowsy Life rubbed her eyes in the alleys. But the road might have run between eld fields and beech-trees. It might have been the good road to the north, with the north wind blowing back our hair. We should not have trod it more gaily.

CHAPTER III

MY father was an amiable fool.

That is not quite true; he was a Hearne, and the black Hearne temper drowsed in him. As he grew older, the thought of his failure was a devil's goad. He fell into rages black as the storms that tear suddenly from the still waters of the sky and lash the crouching moors in fury. Then we fled before him. There was one clear hot morning when Michael and I ran, stumbling, across the open moor. As we ran we left a trail of blood on the moss and red ling. A horsewhip swished round our legs and cut open our heads. Long after he had caught his foot in a hole and lay cursing with a twisted ankle, we ran, hearing my father's heavy steps in every bound of the black-faced sheep, and in the rush of the water rat through the streams hearing the whistle of his whip. We dragged Oliver between us, hot, and sobbing at every step. He was five years old and very fat. His plump little body shrank in terror from the whip. When at last we rested he sat digging his round fists into the ground, and rubbing at his face until earth and tears and tangled red curls made so grotesque an object of him that we laughed, forgetting wounds and hunger.

Sometimes the black mood came on him at night, and then, rolled together for warmth, we slept out in the old quarry. Sometimes, coming home evil drunk, he sat in the kitchen, watching us with a brooding malice. We waited in stiff-limbed terror, moving on legs that jerked and shook. Suddenly something irritated him, and with a roar, he leaped on the fore-doomed wretch and thrashed him until exhaustion stopped his arm.

He never struck my mother but once. He had been particularly cheerful and affectionate, playing and laughing with us in the afternoon. Then at night, in the warm half-lighted kitchen, the evil spirit took him. He sat looking at us with glazed eyes. Mick was recovering weakly from a heavy chill, and his white

face was an offense. He cowered in his chair when the mad thing turned on him. My mother sprang to her feet.

"You touch him," she said, "you touch him."

She spoke in an expressionless voice and her eyes were fixed on my father with an intense burning passion. He stopped short in his torrent of words and stepped back. A hesitant, furtive look crossed his face. Then he smiled. He struck my mother lightly on either ear.

"Will you be pleased to sit down?" he said, with a thin, evil mockery in his voice.

He set a chair and bowed, and smiled into her face. She shivered, and half slipped into the chair. He took a rope from the table drawer and bound her quickly, talking all the while in a gentle voice. He left a long end of rope, and after knotting it in several places, advanced slowly towards Mick.

"Mother and child," he said. "So bound together."

The murderous knotted end hung in the air. In another moment it would have cut down on the terrified boy. But in that moment something happened to me. A vibrant noise that had been running in my head, stopped. I saw everything with great distinctness. Hatred of my father pulsed through my limbs. I stepped across to him, and caught the uplifted arm.

The room swam before me. Mick's white face, my mother's straining body, merged with the shadows of the chairs into a malignant fantasy. I realized that I was rising of six feet tall and strong beyond my fourteen years, while he was but a puny thing with no strength in him but the strength of anger and drink. I shook him until he was limp and detestable.

"Bea n't to strike 'un," I said monotonously, "bea n't to strike 'un."

I heard my mother wailing, but it was far-off and thin, like the wail of the lost soul that goes crying in a curlew's shape. When I let him go, he turned and staggered out of the house. His drunken steps carried him into the low brook, and he lay there, half in and half out of the water, all night long.

The night started a mischief in his body that must have been latent, and within four months he was dead of quick consumption. He lay dying a week. We shrank from him. On the day he

died he asked for us. We slunk into the room, uneasy and ashamed. The pinched, colorless face between the pillows stared furtively at death. He looked tired, as if life had already ebbed far from him, and he lay stretched along the void, listening to its slow-receding shallows. Under the piled-up bed clothes his thin legs were the wrack flung by the surf, drying in the sunlight of death.

His breath was loud, as if he sucked in water and tried to breathe it out again. With an impatient movement of his hand, he had us kneel on the floor at the head of his bed. In his sunken eyes flickered the cracked, distorted love for the dramatic and fantastic face of things that had pricked him oddly all his life. He passed his hand over our heads in turn.

"T is a good lad," he murmured to Oliver, and to Michael — "Unstable as water thou shalt not excel."

I shivered in the hot August sun as the cold fingers pressed upon my head.

"Art hard, Joy," he said. "Art too hard. Shall suffer for 't."

An intolerable pity rose in my throat. "Father—" I said, and with a blind groping—"Feyther."

His face twitched. "The larch trees, Joy?" he said. "Hast forgotten, eh, lad?"

Queer he should remember that then. I was a sullen, slow baby, and would not learn to talk, but one day as he lifted me to touch the feathery green of the young larches I put my arms round his neck, and said—"Feyther." It pleased him, and he boasted of it. I do not think that a man has much real love for his sons, but maybe his first-born takes a hold on him the others do not.

After they went he kept me in the room. I persuaded my mother to go and rest a while. As the room darkened he seemed to get restless. I think his ears strained after that distant, ebbing murmur. His face glistened. "Have made a mess of things," he panted.

"Don't talk," I said.

"I must talk, now or not again. I want to talk. Have spoiled things, failed in all my hand turned to. My fault: I broke my bargains. Life is a question of bargains. You say to her—" I

will do so much work. Mind and body. And you will give me so much ease.' I was to till the earth. I broke the bargain: with my mind that was trained to it; with Life that expected it. So she was free of our contract. I broke it. She owed me nothing. The same with marriage. You make a bargain: you ought to keep it, no matter how hard. No question of immorality, but a bargain's a bargain. Free love, incompatibility — all quibbles. You made a bargain: you ought to keep it. Poor lassie, I have been a disappointment and a torture to her. She worried me, she and her moralities. Have turned from her, broken faith, lied. So I broke another bargain."

He coughed, pressing his head against the wall, and opening his mouth wide.

"Rest," I said, "rest now."

He did not notice me.

"I've thought, if you were strong you could say to Life — 'I break all bargains, yet you shall still pay me.' But for the weak, the ordinary men, they must keep their promises or expect nothing. It is just: I understand. When I did not understand, I was strong and comfortable. Now I die, but it is better to understand. Man ought to understand, but not to whine when Life punishes his failure. It may be that those others, the strong ones, pay after all. They say — 'I will make Life in my image.' And Life, maybe, slips and changes in their hands."

"T is a hard world," I said.

"A just world."

The room was almost dark now. The light coming through the window seemed gathered in one luminous patch on the glistening face. On his high forehead, the wisps of reddish hair lay damp and flat. A thin dark trickle began from the corners of his mouth.

"Open the window," he said.

I set the rattling casement half ajar. The pines were roaring above the hill.

"T is the sea," he murmured. "The wide sea, that troubles for none of us. Shall wash away my sins."

A few moments later he asked for a drink. I brought water from the kitchen, and went for my mother. As we came back we heard him say in a high clear voice — "The larch trees have tiny

pink flowers in March." When we reached him, he was dead.

I think he made a good end. Death is a great sweetener of bad breaths.

With these memories in our hearts, how should we be aught but different and harder?

The winter after his death set sharp teeth in our passing childhood. My mother owned a small cottage on the other side of the moor, and we moved into it. Old debts had taken most of the first quarter's rent from the farm. We were hard put to it all that winter and spring. In December an extraordinary fall of snow shut us off from the world for a fortnight. No one could reach us from the village four miles away. We stared all day across a world shrunk under a sullen dome of sky. We stifled the fear that rose in us as we looked from the dwindling wood pile to the emptying sack of flour. During that fortnight Mary Elizabeth was born, and lived four days.

My mother called her Mary Elizabeth, but she died unbaptized. She was born starved to death. We helped at her birth, and when she died I washed the white frail limbs carefully in a bowl on the kitchen floor, and wrapped them in a clean gown. For two days she lay on the hard sofa, and then we buried her in the snowdrift at the bottom of the garden. That drift must have been twelve feet deep. Oliver wrote an epitaph.

Here lies Mary Elizabeth Hearne.
She is too young and green to burn:
Her soul was like an anxious bird,
That flies before it shall be snared.

He meant it well: the hell-fury of the Rev. Strut had bitten deep into our minds.

As we laid her in the drift, a flock of wild geese passed over our heads, black against the gray sky.

"Quick," Mick cried, his eyes starting in terror from his head — "Oh, quick. Cover her up. She's not baptized. They'll hunt her, they'll hunt her."

We could make fun of the Rev. Strut and his Chief Policeman, but it never entered our heads to doubt the elder, cruel faith. The thought of that terrified child-soul, flying with the

scudding clouds before the long-necked hounds, brought the sweat out on our bodies in the bitter air. We worked feverishly to hide her from the wheeling, screeching torment.

I remember how she looked when they took her out of the drift a week later. I thought that *he* had wished for a daughter. I thought that if, after all, there were anything in the parson's faith, how strange that the first of all our family to greet him should be the infant girl he had not lived to see.

With the memory of that small frozen body in our hearts, how should we not be different and harder?

CHAPTER IV

WE left our moor village for a small house in the town, and there — at school — met Margaret Douglass. She was sixteen when she first came to the school and so shy that an unexpected greeting brought a hot flush to her cheeks, and she would feign ignorance rather than answer a question in class. She covered her shyness with an air of self-possession that amused the whole school. She came on a late train, and through the windows of the sixth form class-room Mick and I watched her saunter down the corridor, push open the door of the fifth form room and make a grave survey of the class before settling herself at her desk. She sat at the desk below Oliver's and she had not been in the school a term before they were open rivals. In all science and mathematical subjects she was hopeless, having had no sort of training in them. But she had been well tutored in Latin and Greek and knew, I suppose, as much of English literature then as most students know at the end of a college course. She had stores of information on odd subjects, and in her delight at the chance of sharing her knowledge wrote essays of abnormal length, full of quaint scraps of philosophy and obscure quotations. Oliver's right to the essay and English honors had never been challenged: he resented her bitterly.

She had been three terms at the school when Michael discovered her, as he had it. Extracts from one of her essays were printed in the school magazine, and impressed him as so uncommonly queer that at the next meeting of the Debating Society he sought her out and walked with her to her rooms. She had by this time given up the daily train journey, going home only at the week-ends. He reported that she had not spoken a word during the whole walk except to thank him gravely for the unnecessary trouble he had taken. But I daresay Mick was entirely unembarrassed by that. Conversations begun by him soon became monologues delivered to a helpless or fascinated audience.

After that I met them several times, walking on the South Cliff or sitting on the rocks at Cayton Bay. Mick was talking, always talking, with wide explanatory gestures. In the school cap and her long straight coat, Margaret was very like a grave beautiful boy. She listened to him with patient interest, her brows drawn down: now and then she would thrust in an odd apt phrase, but at any attempt to force an opinion from her retired into an unhappy silence.

Michael talked as water falls. He had — has still, I suppose — the most restless of minds. I forget how many thousand angels can stand on the point of a pin in the inspired reckoning of the old schoolman, but Mick's mind invented as many theories on slenderer bases than a pin-point of fact. He was five years old when he woke me one night to tell me that he was sure there was no God. Some one had been reading us travelers' tales of the rareness of the Thibetan air, and Mick had reached the conclusion that no God could breathe on the celestial heights. "If he's alive he must breathe. If he's not alive, he's only a great lump. Who's afraid of a lump? Maybe he has gills like a fish." He buried his face in the pillow to smother the crowing laugh that always betrayed him to wakeful adults. I was a year older than he, and I kicked him for blasphemy, but his vision of a finny God stayed with me for weeks. I woke crying with terror from a dream of a clammy cod-faced deity, intolerably slimy and beastly, and in my incoherent relief almost betrayed Mick's depravity.

Later, in our school days, I reminded him of the episode. He laughed and said, "Well, even the Greeks had the sense to put their gods on a habitable Olympus, though if you were to believe everything Greek scholars told you about them, they were the most imbecile race that ever achieved an undeserved immortality." This was just after old Silcox had been trying to persuade us that Greek actors wore masks because the audience would not otherwise have distinguished hero and villain.

We had very few books, and Mick's ideas, common cant enough among the rag-tag and bobtail of the advanced, were incredibly audacious to our thinking. We were all natural skeptics, but Mick got excited about his skepticism and insisted upon threshing things out with us. We sat up in bed and discussed the existence

of God until our eyes were heavy and we fell asleep upon our heresies. I can see now Oliver and Michael, flushed and earnest, scrawling diagrams on the kitchen table and shifting here and there among them a piece of blotting paper soaked in ink. The blotting paper stood for God: they were trying frantically to find a place for him in the universe when vengeance fell upon them for "doing geometry" on the white-scrubbed deal.

At school, all Mick's interest was absorbed by the science side. Long before we had read Wells' romances his mind was a ferment of such fantastic wayfarings. He began a tale round that idea of a kink in space: he began another about a planet so placed that it acted as a receiver for the thought waves given off by ours: there were to be official receivers and one of them was to kill himself for love of an inaccessible woman whose thoughts he had sensed across the impassable gulfs of the ether. He began a play wherein the characters talked and talked and were racked by wild, inexplicable joys and distresses — very like a Dostoïevsky novel. At one time he was burning with indignation about the unspeakable degradations of marriage. He became incoherent at the bare thought of monopolizing the lifetime of a woman, or being monopolized. Love was a godhead, a crying flame, a passion too sacred for the vile touch of dogma. Later still, he discovered eugenics, and thrust the theory at us until we were heartily sick of it, and Oliver said it was a pity the ideas had n't been enforced in time to prevent Mick.

He was, of course, a socialist, and of the oldest and most violent order. His tenebrous enthusiasms drove the rest of us into arid wastes of Fabianism. But long before this we were playing on the way to school a game called Bloody Revolution, in which we stormed barricades, dodged and ran through withering fire, and finally, at the top of the school slope, hailed victory and the triumph of the proletariat. We dreamed of cringing Privy Councillors and three heroic, boyish figures who stood on the steps of the Town Hall and announced the new order to a delirious multitude.

I can only make vague guesses at the chaos that Michael's garrulous madness wrought in Margaret's brain. For a time there was another girl, a thin, dusky little prude, whom he walked up

and down the sands and talked to with a certain amount of caution. I suppose his caution failed him, for one day she turned and walked away alone and would never speak to him thereafter. He swore that he did not know how he had offended, but I daresay he knew quite well. After that, he sought Margaret more often and poured out for her all the misty enthusiasms and fantastic visions which his own mind bred. She had never heard of the social problem but she accepted his socialism unquestioning, and even, pale from sheer nervousness, defended him in debate. Socialism was vastly unpopular in the school and her courage surprised us, though we refrained from praising her to her face. Indeed, Mick gave us little chance to say anything to her face.

I came upon them once, standing at the top of the school slope, and caught the words "free love" and "degradation" in Mick's rapid eager voice. Afterwards I remonstrated with him. He was talking about her.

"You know, Joy," he said, "she's the queerest kid. She knows a devil of a lot about all sorts of things, but about Life she does n't know as much as a babe of five."

"Then you ought to be more careful what you talk to her about," I told him. "I heard you talking about free love this morning. What sort of an effect do you suppose that'll have on the virgin brain?"

"Well," he said, with a sudden shout of amusement, "do you know what she said to me this morning after I had been holding forth for half an hour? She said, 'If free love is the wonderful deathless feeling you say it is, what is its difference from marriage except a few words and a piece of official paper, which you say does n't count for anything anyway?' Oh, she's quick, I tell you."

Oliver looked up from his books.

"She probably does n't take in half of what you say, but she's sharp enough to pretend she does to please you."

Mick thought.

"No," he said slowly, "she takes it in all right. She does n't know anything but books. Maybe Joy's right — it ain't wise to fill her up with all these ——" he hesitated — "speculations," he finished firmly.

Some time later he got up to look for a book and said over his shoulder, "I should n't be surprised at anything that girl became. One of these days she's going to be that self-assured and critical you would n't know her. She has flashes of it now. She's just listening. Taking things in. Sort of testing 'em in her mind. She's discovered that she don't know anything worth knowing. And her mind does n't seem to be full of conventional ruts like most folks' minds."

Oliver was heavily sarcastic.

"Soul development, is it? I'm sorry for the girl."

In the scuffle that followed a chair was broken. Souls and free love and other trivial things were forgotten in a common distress.

After a year and a half at school Margaret went to one of the northern Universities. Michael and I were to have gone to London the same year, but there was no money forthcoming and we stayed on at school. Thus it came about that Margaret had taken her degree — a brilliant first — while we were only finishing our second year. She wrote several letters to Mick, from which he read extracts in support of his belief in her spiritual progress. They were uncommon letters, more the sort of thing one would have expected from a clever boy — with flashes of wit, and quick penetrative judgments on men and thoughts. Clearly, Margaret was coming on.

CHAPTER V

MICHAEL chafed miserably during our last year at school. He looked forward to London with a longing that became almost a fever in the week before we went. He spent his days and the greater part of his nights on the cliffs, and drove my mother to despair by refusing to make any preparation for going.

"Oh, put something in a box," he said. "I don't care. Joy, you do it. I tell you I can't be bothered."

My mother's own patience was wearing thin under the strain of getting together a decent sufficiency of clothes, and squeezing pocket-money from empty purses.

"Be quiet with your something in a box," she said hotly. "Another week of this, and I'll be the something in a box, and God knows I'd be glad to rest in a quiet grave away from the lot of ye."

We went out and walked along the sands past the chiaroscuro of black cliffs, vivid, flitting girls, and red-striped mummers dancing on white boards. We pushed past fat men quivering in their bathing-dress and lean men sticking starkly out of theirs. Poor Punch, disinherited and forlorn, strutted madly on his mock stage. We reached the corner of the cliffs and walked into a world suddenly become round and silent, bounded by cliffs hunched drowsily below the hazy spaces of the sky. The sleek sea, withdrawn beyond flat rocks, stirred through all the little pools across our way.

Mick lay face downwards on the warm sand. He was silent for so long that I thought he had gone to sleep, when he rolled over on his back and sat up.

"I wonder what we'll be thinking next summer," he said. "Sometimes when I think about London I feel as if I were hanging over a void. My mind won't fill it up for me. I feel empty and used-up."

"Well, it's your own fault," I answered. "You've gone on

about it until you think London will fall down as you approach, or else vanish."

"That's just what I do feel. That it will vanish. Turn out as unreal as all this."

"I don't see anything unreal about this," I said carelessly.

"No, of course you don't. There's nothing unreal for you in a world you can paint — or try to paint. But I feel sometimes — I've felt for months, as if sea and cliffs and white houses were a kind of illusion, a colored shadow thrown by something lurking behind them. The shadow might vanish, and leave you looking at — well, what would you be looking at? It might be something malignant or beastly, or there might be nothing there at all."

Mick's sense of humor sometimes reached very near the grotesque, and sometimes fell abruptly into some hole in his consciousness and vanished out of sight. During these lapses his cosmic imagination galloped with him through a nightmare of gloom and foreboding. He saw himself quite seriously as a defiant atom in a universe that rolled menacingly over his head. At these times he was a perfectly impossible companion. He sat huddled in a chair, dropping from despair to despair, until the room was a charnel-house of murdered hopes. Consolation was useless and sarcasm unworthy.

We felt, of course, that he was deliberately posing and posturing in his mind. I do not now believe that he was, not any more than we all are, strutting about in our secret thoughts, comforting ourselves for the dread loneliness of man in a world of men.

There may have been some congenital kink in his mind: my grandfather was given to fits of depression, during one of which he went out and killed all his cattle and every living thing on the farm, while my grandmother and the hired man cowered in the kitchen. Afterwards he locked himself in the dairy with a loaded gun and held off all attempts at capture until the third day, when he shot himself through the head. His son never rallied the family fortunes after this disastrous blow.

There was yet another Michael Hearne, who took to his bed in the thirty-second year of his life and stayed there forty years until his death. During the whole of this time he did not speak a word after once explaining that he did it to escape from the

stupidity of a farmer's life and the perpetual sight and sound of his wife, of whom he was now tired. In appearance Mick is very like this amiable lunatic. They have the same broad foreheads, bright hazel eyes, and general quaintness of feature. I wondered what Mick would have done, had he been condemned to live his life on a desolate moor farm, sleeping, eating, working, and getting children till he died.

He sat now, with his hands clasped round his knees and his face set in the mask of a dejected imp. I knew that he was on the borderland of a lapse, and I tried to ward it off.

"I know you all think I'm going to do well," he said. "The mother expects it. Old Silcox expects it. He said, 'You are the best scientist the school has turned out: we look to you to do great things.' The fatuous old bladder! What right has he, anyway, to expect me to do great things? People have no right to expect things from others. Why can't they let each other alone — running round crying, 'Let me love you. Let me admire you. Do something fine so that we can all stand round and be uplifted and stirred.'——"

"Pity the poor Great Man," I said.

"He ought to be pitied. Swarmed on by all the flabby vampires who want to have their souls tickled and their bowels churned up. Until, if he takes any notice of them, he's exhausted and done for and has to grovel in himself and do his little tricks over again in a false frenzy of inspiration until he dies. . . . I'm sick to death of having a career dangled before me. How can I tell what things will be like when we get to London? I may fail. I may not have the scientific trick. I may not want to succeed."

"Well, if you don't, it will be your own fault," I told him rather sharply. "You're being sent to college to give you a chance you've wanted ever since you've wanted anything."

He rubbed his head until his hair stood up in stricken wisps.

"You would be perfectly happy if you could just be left alone with the earth and the colors thereof. Artists are like that, I suppose." He made one of his unexpected swoops. "What have they ever done to make the world fit for other folk to live in?"

"You have no right to ask art to do good," I said rashly. "It is a good."

"What do you mean, a good?" Mick jeered. "Is it good to eat or good to look at? There can only be one good, one supreme meaning that makes all this — mess — worth while, or else makes it an indecent nightmare. Life for Art's sake — I read that in a book. It would be just impertinent if it were not so silly. I don't see myself that art has anything to do with life, except the accident that most artists can only stick dead slabs of it on to their canvas."

"It's too damned hot to argue with you," I said. "Besides, I don't see how all this bears on you and your inability to stick to your last. Must you have all the world tidied up, with smiling morning face, before you can get down to the work you've trained for?"

"Don't be an ass, Joy," he said. "That's not what I'm getting at. Only, for pity's sake, persuade them at home to shut up about my chances and my career. It makes me sick."

He stood up. His hands were full of fine warm sand. He let it trickle slowly between his fingers.

"I might be poured out like that," he said, with a quick smile, "and to as much purpose."

We walked back along the sands. I had an irrational sense that I owed Mick an apology.

"I'm sorry if I seemed unsympathetic," I began. "I know that if I were free to do as I pleased, I'd waste my life pretending there is no muddle and no misery. If I were rich I should probably have spent my youth at art schools, or tearing round Paris and Italy, licking the varnish off great men's pictures, and explaining why my own were greater than they looked. But there the disorder is — and I suppose one ought to take a hand at clearing it up."

Mick was not listening. A girl, leaning over the Spa wall, had smiled down at him, an impudent, challenging beauty with bared breast and dusky hair. He set off at a great rate for the Spa gates.

CHAPTER VI

IT was growing dark when we reached London. Scattered suburbs and fields flowed past the train, a limpid, colorless stream. Houses thickened and piled upon each other. On the elfin green of the sky, roofs, and spires and squat gasometers traced an intricate pattern of thrusting lines and flat shadows. Narrow streets rushed away from the train and poured themselves into the teeming obscurity. The town turned a frowsy back to the railway line, with gaping seams of alleys and exhausted, dragging limbs.

We felt very small and thin in the rush of King's Cross. Mick was for taking a taxi to the rooms we had engaged, but we were afraid to spend so much money, and in the end left our boxes in the cloakroom, and stepped out with our bags into the confused brilliance of the streets. We found our way to the Strand. The wide pavements, splashed with light, and fantastic shadows, excited me. I could have shouted along the streets. I wanted to open my arms and gather the rushing life to me, abandon myself to it, let it sweep through me.

We found the entrance to King's and walked shyly round the quadrangle. "It hardly seems to be in the same world as all that," Mick said, jerking his head towards the Strand.

We came out and wandered east. Fleet Street was a magic name. We babbled of dead men and peered into the faces of the passers-by as we might have peered at the citizens of a city in the moon. At the foot of Ludgate Hill we summoned up courage to ask directions, and a little while later got wearily into a train at St. Paul's. We were so tired that we crossed the river without seeing it, and walked away from Herne Hill station like men in a trance. We tried to tell each other what we thought of London, but our words were spiritless.

"It is different," Mick kept saying, "it's not as I thought it would be. It's bigger and finer — and worse."

CHAPTER VII

MICHAEL and I were up for a year before the others came. We were poorer than usual and our rooms were greasy and detestable. Mick made friends, as he always does, and betook himself to the cheerful flat shared by two school teachers. They read "The New Age" to him and tried to poison him with camp coffee. One of them had rather pretty hair: she used to take it down for him to feel as she read, thus mingling, with a nice judgment, intellectual and sensuous titillations.

Accident or perversity led me for a time into a college set whose habits I did not like and could not afford. It included two or three fine-featured Jews who spent their money with an air contemptuously tolerant of Gentile whims. The rest of us rode in their cars, drank their wine, and hit them boisterously between the shoulder blades in mute reminder that we bore them no ill-will for the dark ages when they incited our fathers to persecute them.

Michael watched my progress among the Sons of Belial with an amusement that ignored my constant ill-temper. I ran into debt, neglected my work, and at the end of a month regarded my companions with an indiscriminate loathing. I think they drank as a kind of mental exercise: certainly I never knew them to allow their minds any other. Such of them as came from the shire aristocracies held social and ethical views that I can only explain on the theory that the old county families are succumbing to a slow form of insanity induced by in-breeding.

They talked of their wretched adventures into Piccadilly with a determined, heavy cynicism. I have to own that it intimidated me into concealing my innocence of like adventures.

It is easy to exaggerate their viciousness. Indeed, I do not believe them to have been vicious at all in the real sense of the word. It was just that their code permitted them any self-indulgence so long as they did not transgress certain well-defined rules of breeding. They believed in the existence of what some of them

did actually call pure women — of their own class. And these they held inviolate, partly, I suppose, because of the need to keep up the supply of desirable wives. Women below their class were fair game. If a pretty shop-girl liked to be a fool, why should one not profit by her folly, doubtless arranged for by a God who understood the need for pretty fools?

I believe that they regarded the lower classes in general as existing for their support and convenience. They did not, of course, think out any deliberate philosophy of life: they did not think at all. But their lives were based on some such unconscious mental attitude, bred and fostered in them from their youth up. Some of them — Louis Sarscon for one — were destined for the higher civil service, and there they will carry on a complicated system of misgovernment with a faith in its worth and permanence that would be pitiful were it not so arrogant and expensively futile.

We met most often to drink in Sarscon's rooms. Like everything he owned, they toppled over the far side of comfort into ostentation. There was a full-sized grand, and three huge chesterfields, too fat and too low for real use. I grumbled at the heat of the room.

"'S Louis' fault," some one said. "It's warm round Jerusalem, you know."

Louis Sarscon looked calmly at the speaker.

"Fairly hopeless sort of a fool, aren't you?" he said.

"Fool, is it?" Hervey spluttered. "Well if I am, you're a — Jew."

"Hervey's beastly drunk. Hervey, you ought to get your nurse to put you to bed."

Hervey became outrageous, and the blood began to show under Sarscon's pale skin.

"If I ever feel inclined to wish I were not a Jew," he said, "I have only to look round at my Christian friends."

"The distinction isn't a true one," I interrupted, "for your friends aren't Christians and you're not a Jew." My mind appeared to me amazingly lucid: I wanted to take half-a-dozen brilliant lines of argument and crush him once and for all. "A Jew has a religion and the features and manners of an ancient race. You have no religion and you pride yourself on possessing the

features and bearing of the country where you happened to be born. Why, you haven't even a nationality. You don't want to go back to Zion: you only want Palestine for *the others* to go there."

"Well," he said coolly, "where'd you be without us? You used to rob and torture us. Now we rule you. We control more than half the wealth of the world. We sway nations — continents."

"Europe," I said thickly — "Europe has the Jews she deserves."

His self-control snapped: he flung himself towards me, and I stood laughing stupidly at his waving arms as he struggled in the grasp of a muscular engineering student.

Hervey drunk was at least as humorous as a modern comedy or as his father stalking to bed in a dignified intoxication after a day spent in the trial of drunkards and poachers. Somewhere about the fifth glass he thought he was a boy scout and took cover under the rug. He wriggled with infinite care round the legs of the grand, and pounced, squealing, upon Sarscon. Louis kicked him viciously. Shouting with rage, Hervey picked up the Jew, staggered away into the bathroom, and there held him in the bath with both taps running until he was soaked through. We laughed so much that we could not pull Hervey off him. When at last he was free he stood tearing at his sodden clothes, looking more like a Jew than I had ever seen him. The swaying electric globes over the bath took Hervey's attention: he watched them gravely for a while and then, lifting his hand, deliberately smashed one after the other. Then he gathered up his hat and coat and went with the bearing of the Gentile conqueror. We followed, still laughing weakly, through the deserted streets and squares between the British Museum and Euston Road. In King's Cross station he gave twopence to every porter and left a shilling with his card for the station-master. Outside on the pavement he sat down and cried because, he said, I was such an awful liar. I do not remember how we got him away, or how I reached home.

The thought of my lost control annoyed me intensely in the morning. When Englishmen get drunk they make such fatuous and puerile fools of themselves. Two or three such scenes sickened me of the whole crowd, and I should have broken with them

sooner than I did had it not been for Mick's ironical prophecies of disaster.

An evening in March put an end to my exalted friendships without much regret on either side. I had met Sarscon and half-a-dozen others hurrying across the quad. "Come along, J. J.," Louis called, "we're tearing it to-night." We called in at three or four places and we were none of us quite sober when Hervey said—"I know a house where they'll be glad to see us. What you say?" Louis patted him on the head. "Good boy," he said. "Lead on." I did not know London then, and I am not sure where the house was. We certainly stumbled along Gower Street and made two or three turnings before we stopped in front of a tall house in a darkened side-street. Hervey knocked at the door. He waited a bit and knocked again. It opened barely half-way. Hervey thrust his head through the opening. "Let us in, Anna Mary," he said. "We've come to call."

The door was flung wide and we trooped in. Anna Mary was old and incredibly active. She swirled and chuckled before us into a large empty room on the first floor. There was a slamming of doors and a rustle of dresses on the stairs. Five or six girls ran into the room and one of them threw her arms round Hervey. "Oh, Dickie boy," she cried, "where have you been? It's ages since you kissed your little Gracie."

It was suddenly clear to me that I did not want to be there. I thought of the scene there would be if I tried to get away, the oaths and the screeched protests. While I thought of escape the others had finished drinking and got themselves out of the room. I was left with the old woman. She looked at me and began a long soothing speech. It was a moment or two before I caught the drift of it. She had got into her head that I wanted one of the girls who had gone. She was trying to pacify me for having to wait my turn. I made her understand somehow that I did not want any of them. I would wait for the others to come down—oh yes, I would wait. She regarded me with half-roused suspicions that vanished when she saw I did not mean to leave the house before the rest. Evidently I was annoyed at having missed my choice. She shrugged her shoulders and prepared to be agreeable. I have a confused memory of her rambling talk: she told

me about her girls and her adventures with the police. I began to be interested: one by one the others came down; no one seemed to realize that I had been there all the time, and we left with much caution and subdued laughter.

It must have been five o'clock before I reached home. A great arc of saffron light, barred and rimmed by drifting clouds, gleamed in the east. I had lost my latchkey and I groped for small stones to throw through the open window of Mick's room. He looked out at me for a minute and then came stumbling down to open the door. "Dejected philosopher," he observed, "worn in studying the nature of Sin."

"Don't be a fool," I said irritably, "I'm through with it, I tell you."

CHAPTER VIII

AT the end of our first year Oliver joined us. We moved into better rooms and took in with us another second year man. Anthony Calvert had attracted us first by his dry wit in debate. He was a Yorkshireman like ourselves — not one of your hybrids from the West Riding — but a Yorkshireman from the North Riding dales, with an uncommon gift for apt phrases. He had no uncouth convictions, but professed himself amiably a Guild Socialist, and read in the literature of the Middle Ages for pleasure. His face and his silences belied him. He looked a pleasant type of the English intelligentsia: he was in truth a quick, subtle thinker, something of a scholar and a hardy lover of moors and ploughed earth. He had a truly magnificent collection of folksongs, to which he wrote and played his own accompaniments, getting out of that unsatisfactory instrument the piano, some of the poignant qualities of the violin.

Anthony had been with us just a week when Mick had one of Margaret's rare letters. He took it from the postman on the doorstep and did not open it until we were half-way down Denmark Hill. He turned the first page and stopped in the middle of the road. "I'm damned," he said. "Listen to this."

He read us the dry, casual sentence in which Margaret told her engagement to an engineering student. Mick waved the letter in our faces. "I'm enraged," he said. "I'm thoroughly annoyed. What right has any man to come thrusting in alienating Margaret's young affections? She's done for! She's in love. She'll never do another stroke of work."

Oliver stood and laughed at him. "You'll have to listen to dreamy raptures. She'll empty bucketsfull of female psychology on you. Serve you damn well right. Trafficking in souls!"

He flung back his head and laughed so loudly that a decent old gentleman of the stockbroker sort looked at him as if he were an open drain.

But although Mick wrote recklessly for details of the tragedy he got neither raptures nor psychology. Margaret wrote—"You ask for details. Any I could give would deservedly bore you. I hope it will not be long before you meet Keith. We have been friends too long—you and I—for me to pretend indifference to your opinion of him."

After this letter she did not write again for nearly a year.

Long afterwards, when pretenses and reservations were no longer possible between us, Margaret told me the story of that year. I might have spared her the telling. She told me nothing that I had not guessed, but the things had to be said between us.

We thought that they had. To tell the truth, a dozen words had been ample. We were too young to have that much wit: nothing would do for us but that we must plunge into one of those dreadful discussions wherein youth endeavors to discover its soul and is ever after heartily ashamed of its nakedness.

"It is absurd to blame Mick for the muddle I have made of things," Margaret said. "He *did* have an influence on me. I had never heard any one talk as he did. His ideas were new and amazing. I had nothing to measure them by. You know what sort of a childhood I had, shut off from other children. Why, I never left that great house on the moor edge until I insisted upon coming to school. Eighteen months at school, and then college. Think for yourself what a chaos of impressions and ideas my mind must have been. I tried to hide it. I wanted to get things straight. Then I met Keith. I liked him because he reminded me of Mick. When I knew him better, I was astonished to find him talking the same sort of misty nonsense. It was as if I had stumbled on a language I knew in a country of strangers. We sought each other out." She hesitated. "I suppose there is something fine about a youthful mating. I thought so then."

She paused again. "There was a kind of ferment in my thoughts—started somehow by Mick, and the new crowded life. Oh," she cried suddenly, "you know the sort of creature a sex idealist is. Wallowing . . ."

"Margaret!"

"It's true." Her voice hardened. "You know that it's true. I don't idealize you. I love you: I'm not in love. Keith was different. There was a kind of deliberate fantasy — romance — about that. It was fine and — unreal. Can a thing be fine and unreal, or are all unreal things vile at bottom? It did not seem vile. It took our breath with its beauty then."

A curious tender smile flickered in her eyes. "You must n't think that Keith took advantage of me, or anything so stupid and untrue as that."

"He took advantage of your ignorant enthusiasms," I said.

"His own were as ignorant," she answered swiftly. "We were both young: we talked it over together. We talked and thought about it too much. I don't know whose fault that was. You can talk yourself into anything. . . . We could n't, in the nature of things, marry for years, and it seemed useless and wrong to wait." She drew her brows together. "The moral code did n't grip us at all. I suppose that for many young people it is losing its grip. Not only for freaks. There was nothing particularly freakish about me. And Mick's teaching did n't really influence me much. I think still that we were right. There is something indecent, to my mind, about the spectacle of two young people clutching futilely at each other, living for months and years in a kind of hot-house of exaggerated passion, until they have been solemnly legalized to take their passion to a decent marriage bed." She looked at me with a half-mocking defiance. "I can't put it any more tactfully, Joy, or I would."

I laughed a little, and something of the strain was gone from her voice when she went on.

"I don't admit for a moment that we were wrong. Only it did n't work out right. It was n't love. I can't tell you when I found that I was beginning to live up to Keith. Pretenses that were involuntary at first became conscious and irksome. I hid things from him, pretended things I did n't feel. The life I lived with him was full of suppressions and unhappy failures. We lived a furtive sort of life. Feelings that surprised us both — irritations — flashes of hatred — kept thrusting up through the tenderness. Keith felt it too. We tried desperately hard to pre-

tend it was n't so, but we knew . . . And all the time there was a kind of pity in us for the beauty that was going. I feel it now . . ."

I watched the red marks fading on her fingers where one hand had gripped the other. "Margaret," I said, and moved towards her. But she held herself from my touch.

"Let me finish, Joy," she said. "It is hard to say which feeling was most real, the tenderness or the ugly irritations. Keith often thought me perverse. He tried to alter me in little ways. Even, I tried to alter myself. I could n't do it, you know. My pretenses came clattering down upon my head. The strain was too great. It would have been a — a sort of temperamental hari-kari." She stopped and looked at me with a smile that twisted her mouth. "Why don't you laugh, Joy?"

"I can't."

She thought a minute. "Our differences did n't matter at first, not until we'd got past the little delights of being together, the gentle, intimate things. When we got further down, to the things that really matter, the bedrock of personality, there were hideous, gaping differences. We had to draw back and pretend that they were not there. At bottom, Keith is a creature of conventions. He likes to think what the rest think. His adventure into the romantic began to feel unstable to him. He wanted it to end comfortably. Things I said worried him. He began to think that a legal marriage would put things right. He complained that I was a pagan."

"So you are," I interrupted. "Your mind is pagan, logical, loving order and ordered beauty."

She was not listening.

I opened the window and a breeze came into the room. She seemed to have grown suddenly tired, leaning against the wall in the shadow by the window. I stood looking at the outline of her throat against the dark curtains, and her pale averted face. It hurt me intolerably.

"That is just how things are. Keith keeps writing of marriage. We have no one to consult. My uncle would n't interfere with me in a thing like that. Besides, he rather likes Keith." She turned to me with a swift, fierce movement. "I am sorry for Keith.

Something in me goes on loving Keith. I can't bear to hurt him."

"You can hurt me," I said hardily.

"You can take care of yourself," she answered, and turned her head to look at me.

I took a step towards her. "Margaret," I said, and again stupidly — "Margaret. You can't treat me like this. Don't you see you can't? You're asking the impossible of me — of yourself." My self-control broke. I knew that she was sore and wretched beyond all desire or thought of passion. Her whole being cried out to me to leave her alone, but I took her in my arms and kissed her white face and held her. She slipped from me. Her words were an instinctive defense.

"Have n't you understood yet?" she whispered. "You don't want me — Keith's mistress."

"What do I care?" I said. "What does anything matter like that? I never knew Keith's mistress. It's you I want."

I talked at her. I tried absurdly to wake the spirit in her. I blustered. And all the time she stood and looked at me with an infinite patience for my unkind folly. When I fell silent, she stooped and kissed my hair and was gone. I sat on while the room grew cold, and the wind blew the ashes on the hearth.

Life would be much simpler if we were a little more parsimonious of speech. I wish I could blame Ibsen and the Russians for the habit of soul-dissection that is spreading a gray slime over modern conversation. But the French had a hand in that too. The old saloon and coffee-house talkers did things better.

We avoided each other for several days.

We took ourselves so seriously. Heaven knows where our sense of humor was during that horrible conversation. Grinning in some distant corner, I suppose. What solemn mountebanks!

CHAPTER IX

WHEN Margaret wrote to Michael again it was to tell him that she had been offered a research scholarship and meant to study in London. We held a conference on the letter. Michael was anxious to have her share our rooms. "She'll monopolize the best chair and want her books carrying to the 'bus," Oliver remarked viciously.

We discussed the question from our various points of view, and then sat looking at each other. Anthony, who had never met Margaret, poked carefully at his pipe and said—"What you really mean is that there'll be intellectual flirtations and all that sort of thing—H. G. Wells in real life."

"Margaret isn't like that and neither are we," Mick said shortly. He looked at me. "What do you say, Joy?"

"I don't mind," I answered slowly. "She's your friend, not mine. I never really knew her. I daresay it'll work all right."

Margaret was traveling in Scotland at the time, and Michael's letter asking her to share our rooms was not forwarded. We wondered at her silence. It was late in August when she appeared in Scarborough, penitent and explanatory. I had not seen her since she left school and Mick had not prepared me for the change in her. She was beautiful, with a gravely radiant beauty like the dusk in summer. A serene self-possession had replaced the school-girl's defiant shyness. She was so light-hearted withal: it hurts me to think of that untouched gaiety.

She had not made up her mind to share our rooms. I think she was afraid of Oliver. He had replied to some remark of hers with a sarcastic reminder of the unwieldy, endless essays that she wrote at school. She flushed and did not answer him. Afterwards, when Mick and I were sitting with her on the sands, she said slowly—"Are you sure that you have room for me and want me?"

"Of course we want you," Mick said. "The question is—do you want to come?"

"I'd be only too glad to come. I've never been to London." She looked at me.

"We'll be fearfully sorry if you don't come," I assured her. "It seems so silly, too, when we have decent rooms and could help you a lot, showing you round the town, and all that sort of thing."

In a while she agreed, hesitating a little, as if she doubted our sincerity.

We persuaded her — Mick and I — to come to town with us a fortnight before the beginning of the term. The first night that we were there, she said that she hated armchairs and liked a decent straight-backed seat. We accepted the statement in good faith, and continued to quarrel over the two easy chairs as was our custom. Long afterwards, Margaret owned to the diffidence that had suggested the lie: she did n't want us to feel she had a feminine right to the armchair.

Truth to tell, she slipped so easily into our way of life that her coming made no difference to our habits. She roved round the town with us as if she had been another man. We must have been a queer sight. Margaret's tweeds came from a famous house in the Haymarket, and we boys prided ourselves on the villainous state of our clothes. I believe Mick was, for a few weeks, actually out at elbow. I have seen people turn and glance from Margaret to Oliver's vile yellow norfolk and mass of red gold hair. He never wore a cap and his eyes were bright and green like the eyes of a wild cat. No one looked at the rest of us when he was in the room, though I stood head and shoulders above him and Mick had the face of a youthful gargyle.

One of Oliver's objections to Margaret had been her money. Her mother died at her birth and her father shut himself and his daughter in a vast house on the moors. The child grew up in a solitude peopled by creatures of fantasy. Her father assured himself at times that the servants were not preaching a God who strikes wilful children dead, and then forgot her. He was a free thinker by birth and believing that questing faith to be still in need of defense from priests and women, wrote sad books in praise of Pan. Margaret spent her lonely freedom between the barren

sweep of moor and the shore of the sea that filled the wide air with a myriad-mouthed chorus.

A sullen persistence had got her the brief schooling at Scarborough, and during her second year at college her father died. The house on the moors was sold to pay his debts. An unknown uncle came from Scotland to make the arrangements. He was exclusively Whisky: you will have seen him on labels in clubs and in unobtrusive advertisements in "Country Life." He adopted Margaret but, strange to say, made no attempt to order her way of life. There was something queer about all Margaret's relatives on her father's side: they did n't seem to have any of the decent domestic virtues of unlimited interference with the young.

When she came to live with us she refused the massive allowance he tried to make her. "I have never been used to a lot of money, and I don't want it," she said. I do not know how far this was sincere and how far prompted by a determination to have no advantage over the rest of us.

We came to London early in the September of 1910, and I spent my days in the reading room of the British Museum, while Michael and Margaret surveyed London together. They spent enormously in bus fares and ate sparse meals in out-of-the-way corners. I came into the entrance hall one day and found them waiting for me. Mick was absorbed in conversation with a young woman done in primary colors. Margaret stood helpfully at his side, grave and attentive. When I caught her eye she smiled radiantly upon them and came to meet me. They took no notice at all of her departure: we left them there and went home together.

"Who the devil?" I began.

Margaret grinned. "She's an American. Mick is telling her the exact number of vases in the Greek section, the miraculous birth of Amen Hetep, the diameter of the pillars and the location of the man-traps for burglars, and she is writing it all down in a little book."

Mick reached home an hour after we did, vastly indignant at what he called our callousness. "Leaving me there with that female," he said. "I might have been on my way to Minneapolis by now, for all you cared. I believe I shall go to America, there's scope for enterprise there."

Shortly afterwards, declaring that he must have tobacco, he left by way of the window for the little shop at the top of the street. He had been gone two minutes when there came a great knocking at the door. Margaret went to let him in. I heard her voice in the passage raised with an intonation of anxiety. "Oh," she said, and then — "We did n't expect you until to-morrow."

"Well," Oliver answered brusquely, "we've come to-night. This is Anthony Calvert. Calvert, this is Margaret."

They came into the room as Mick flung himself through the window. He rushed at Oliver, re-introduced Anthony to Margaret, and shouted for food. Oliver threw himself violently at an arm-chair: it cried out, shook, and collapsed in the fender.

"You silly ass," Mick cried wrathfully. "Can't you be a big blond beast without breaking chairs? You low superman, you! Heaven knows what we'll have to pay for that." He grumbled until food came in, and the landlady, whom he so bewildered with explanations, grief and promises, that she retreated before the wrecked chair with no more than a broken exclamation.

Some time after dinner, Margaret and Oliver began a dispute that ran the course of all Oliver's arguments — through sarcasm to ill-temper and a moody silence. He was dogmatic beyond all bearing in a youngest brother, and as intolerant of other folks' opinions as he was contemptuous of their intelligence. Strangers, fascinated by Mick's charm of manner, wondered discreetly how he came to have so uncouth and ruffianly a brother. Three months later, supposing them to have made difficult advances in intimacy, they wondered why Oliver, with his simplicity of speech and purpose, was so tolerant of Mick's superficial brilliance and wilful instability.

But strangers, who like poor Glaucon ask the silly questions, deserve the punishment that descends. Glaucon might sit i' the sun tearing acanthus leaves to shreds, and let his thoughts go dreaming through deep groves or lie couched among the violet leaves beside the white limbs of Callia, while the thunder rolled harmlessly over his head and Socrates spun his wordy immortality. But you, luckless wretch, must sit reading in an English drawing-room while I bemuse myself with ruthless psychological intent. Faith, I am so moved by the contrast that I cannot do 't.

All my mother in me rushes to my eyes: my pity for you is such that I will spare you the psychology. Subtle is as subtle does, and Mick is now an F.R.S. and almost a rich man, while Oliver — but you read the sixpenny papers and know all about Oliver. He writes those vivid, pellucid poems of his in a two-roomed cottage, and all his money would go in the Shepherd's Purse that grows beyond his door-step. Perhaps you know himself, and he has done you some kindness. Friend nor enemy ask him for help in vain. Or he has made trouble for you by one of his preposterous social blunders. Choose for yourself between the stranger's judgments, and let me get on with my tale.

I forget what they quarreled over. Mick crowed and thumped his book, and Anthony swung round on his piano stool to listen. In her way Margaret was as dogmatic as Oliver but immensely more critical — a critic unburdened by any notions of what she ought to like and dislike. She disliked the plays of W. B. Yeats. "Feeble, windy ghosts," she called them, and when Oliver began an indignant mouthing of the lyrics, said — "If you must quote Yeats, don't let it be 'Innisfree.' When no other distinction remains to the Irish lyricists they may still pride themselves on having evolved the ugliest adjective in modern poetry. *The bee-loud glade*. Bee-loud! Good heavens!"

From poetry they got somehow to Wagner, and Margaret made scornful reference to the circus-music of Tannhauser. Anthony lifted his eyebrows and played gentle airs from *Die Meistersinger*. I cannot remember the musical argument, which went all in Oliver's favor. Margaret's technical knowledge failed, and she was fain to drag ethics from its bench to help her. Wagner's music, she said, harked back to the satyr-gods, and gathered to itself all the elements that had been purged from tragedy in its long ascent.

"When I see people reeling drunkenly away from *Tristan und Isolde*," she added, "I thank God I am not as other men." We laughed at her, but Oliver was too angry to laugh. Anthony turned back to the piano and got himself softly into Beethoven. We were silent, listening.

CHAPTER X

WHAT amazes me when I look back on our life in London is not its inconsequence, nor its unleashed enthusiasms, nor even its perilous freedom. It is our devastating indulgence in talk and self-explanatory criticism. It might be forgiven us, for we were born in an era of talk. People were talking all round us, explaining life to themselves and themselves to life. We had a desire to make trial of life that might have led to adventures if we had been in Texas, but since we were in London, led only to confusion of thought and blunting of sincerity.

There have been earlier eras of talkers. Certain men met in a grove of plane-trees and talked to the stars, who continue to echo their words. There were also men and women who sat on silk brocade, talking graceful revolution until the ground opened and swallowed them up. I have no quarrel with such disinterested babblers.

But the talkers of our day were afflicted with the Russian fever and the Fabian itch. They could neither let themselves nor their surroundings be. They tore both to pieces, strewing the fragments to the suffering winds, or re-arranged them in grotesque mosaics. They sat in cafés and talked art with their quaint women folk. They founded reviews wherein to scratch each other's backs. They became bitter and wrote unkind manifestos. They were abusive and superior, austere and licentious, and each according to the best and newest tradition. They talked themselves into every kind of pose. They even became martyrs.

It was not to be expected that we should escape the plague.

We were in London, held and fascinated by the ferment of a million-minded, million-bodied activity. We belonged to no set or class, but we touched the fringes of many of them. We could make a show of watching their interplay of forces. For we affected a dispassionate attitude to life: we investigated it, talked about it, but never admitted either to bewilderment or awe. We

had a half-conscious idea of ourselves as skeptical young Olympians, clear-eyed before the shams and ridiculous absorptions of a middle-aged society.

At least we had a halting perception of the extraordinary chaos of modern life, rushing into blind creeks, sweeping back in wave upon wave of seemingly resistless power, with leaping white spume of cross-currents and sunlit, day-born shallows. At the older Universities, we said, men hear life through the shutters of warm-lighted rooms — a far-off murmur, kindly and alluring, the sea calling to quiet inland towns, so distant and secure that the harshness and the fretting are only deeper notes in the ordered harmony. They are an ancient and isolated people, holding even against their will to the attenuated feelings and ideals that the years have smoothed and softened for them. They cannot help being swayed by that murmuring age-old voice. Life is refracted for them by a glass that mellows all its colors, thinning them. Doubtless they talk as much as we do, plan and speculate, but they have it all out of perspective. Things that matter enter their life from wrong angles and in distorted shapes. Some of them take up socialism and others actresses. The actresses are more amusing, but the socialism is considered to be in better taste. The earnest ones read revolutionary pamphlets, with cover designs of classic youths and maidens fronting the dawn: it must bother them immensely to meet the complacent, greasy cave-man of the lower middle-class, and the broken torn wreckage of the slum — if indeed they permit themselves to run the risk of meeting such annoying contradictions of their orderly ideals. It is far more likely that from Oxford and Cambridge they retire to county and parliamentary fastnesses, or if they are very earnest, become talking members of the National Liberal Club and the Fabian Society.

Women come into their world in an awkward fashion, thrusting athwart their dream of life, rather than taking a place in the fabric of its reality. Some of them still affect a romantic belief in the essential fineness of women. They cannot, such is the unfortunate keenness of their intellect, help having secret, pleasurable doubts, but these they suppress with nobility. They discuss the new demands of women, and nerve themselves to a gracious and comprehending toleration, ignorant apparently, that women

long since passed the stage of needing or caring to be believed in. And afterwards, when their easy toleration is laughed at or ignored, they are hurt and fall into psychological quagmires and bemusings. Some of them write novels about it.

"They have two sorts of ways of regarding women in those old-world retreats," Margaret said. "For one kind of man there's nothing between the fatuity he marries and the painted adventures of Piccadilly. The other, the better kind, is still trying hardily to understand us, when really we don't care a damn whether we're understood or not. You've only got to live with us and let us live with you without picking at our souls or distracting yourselves with a preposterous sex psychology."

Margaret lived with us for three years, and during the whole of that time I do not remember that her femininity obtruded itself upon us, either as a pleasing study or as a nuisance. She just was there: we quarreled among ourselves, argued and fought, and wandered round London together as if we had been five men. Even when Oliver fell in love with her, it made no difference to the rest of us, except that he sulked a good deal and sat huddled up over the fire in the best armchair. Margaret ignored his moods admirably. He would have fallen in love just the same had she lived at the other end of London — with her or another — and it would have made neither more nor less difference to the rest of us. There were one or two incidents, but they were kept in the background by both.

My love for Margaret stands out as something apart from the cheerful, careless comradeship of that student life, a force that appeared out of the darkness and went again, leaving us shaken and blinded, but nowise afraid of our life together or awkward in the daily intimate relationship. We knew each other too well: were too aware of the littleness and meanness in each other as of the fine possibilities and the things that stirred and held.

I think it rather an important thing — our freedom from the obsession of a romantic sex ideal that keeps bursting out even now in books by men on the Soul of Woman, or thrusts up in a strange, perverted form as a bitter antagonism to all that savors of feminism. We had no delusions even about those feminine demands and rebellions that so intrigued the imagination of the

thinking male ten or twenty years ago. We had seen them in their stark and futile silliness.

It must have been early in the spring of 1913 — not six years ago, and how queer and doll-like the figures and colors are now — when we walked down Charing Cross Road into a crowd that eddied about the Square, flowed over in the track of the 'buses, and stood in detached quarrelsome groups on the steps of the National Gallery. At the foot of the Monument a wisp of a woman shook and worried her body in the throes of a speech we could not hear. A few men and girls held banners round her and listened indifferently. We hesitated.

"Oh, come on," Oliver said, with a violent affectation of scorn. We pushed and scrambled round the edges of the crowd and got into Whitehall, delayed once by Mick's halt before a scared little man whom he accused of being a detective. "Come out and stand round in those boots, and think you'll not be known," he said. "You must be silly."

"I'm no detective," the little creature cried indignantly. "Why, I'm a Fabian."

"I see no difference," Mick retorted.

We were half-way down Whitehall before we realized that the noise behind had become deafening. A nondescript crowd, waving its arms, and shouting "to Downing Street," poured out of the Square and rolled past us, the little woman vociferous in front. A single line of police stretched across the road, and before that thin barrier the huge crowd wavered, turned and broke into helpless confusion. A red-faced man with a desolate squint put a protecting arm round the small woman, and the two reeled across the road in frantic embrace. Policemen on horseback appeared and began to drive the people back towards the Square. A man was caught and squeezed between two horses and screamed fearfully. Bodies of mounted police poured suddenly out of Northumberland Avenue and the Mall, and rode down upon the crowd already surging towards them. Possibly the policemen were alarmed, or their horses ran away with them. Whatever its cause, the effect upon the crowd of the double charge was disastrous. Men and women ran madly backwards and forwards. We saw a man coming out of Scotland Yard struck down on the pave-

ment and carried off with the blood pouring down his face, and a woman rescued by foot police from two roughs. Michael rushed in to help and was seized: we saw him fighting and kicking ignominiously. In the confusion the little woman was borne off in a police taxi: we thought that the red-faced man wept.

Then two mounted police bore down upon us: I flung an arm across Margaret and pressed her against the wall. For a minute the murderous hoofs slipped on the glass roof of the cellar below our feet, recovered, and slipped again. Margaret, incoherent with rage, shook her fist at the nervous riders. They drew away: pushing somehow through the demoralized crowd and the frightened animals, we got out into the Strand. An old gentleman stood beside us with a torn coat and hot, creased face. He was furiously angry, and gesticulated in our faces. "On the pavement," he said, "it is shameful, shameful. To ride those mad animals on the pavement."

The English, who are the most disorderly race in the world, have the greatest reverence for the appearance of order.

He stammered. "I walk on the Embankment with my wife, as I have done every fine afternoon for twelve years. My wife thinks we should return for tea, and so we do, and suddenly those monsters are upon us, riding on the pavement among decent folk."

"But where is your wife?" Margaret said gently.

He looked at us once in reproach and plunged back into the crowd. Shortly Mick joined us, in an indescribable state of mind and apparel. He had been kicked in the mouth and could not speak.

Some weeks later Margaret was mixed up in a suffrage row in Hyde Park and came home white and shaken, clutching the torn fragments of a ruffle that she had worn round her neck. She had been turned out of the Park six times, and finally rescued from arrest by a kindly gas-worker, who lifted her over the railings into the sympathetic arms of a frayed young man. The frayed one told her inopportunely that he was an Anarchist with Shavian leanings.

She was indignant beyond measure and too ashamed of herself to keep up her pose of Olympian serenity. We stared at her

stupidly and wondered what had wrought such madness in our self-possessed Margaret.

"I don't know," she said. "Really I don't know. It just happened to me. I did n't even know there was a suffrage meeting until I came upon it out of Kensington Gardens. Some one — a gray little woman with untidy hair — asked me to speak. They were speaking in groups all over the place and the police kept separating them and moving them on. I made a speech. I don't know what I said — some sort of deflated nonsense, I suppose. Then the police grabbed us and ran us out into Park Lane. I got excited and angry. I must have gone rather mad, I think. Anyway, I went back into the Park, dragging that poor little woman with me. I went back six times, and the police were worse each time. I knew I was making a fool of myself, and I could n't help it."

She pushed her sleeve up, and we saw that her arm was discolored and swollen from shoulder to wrist. "They twisted my wrists," she said, "and one of them got me by the throat. The things I said — and did. You would n't believe. I kicked him and trod upon his feet. I made unspeakable remarks: I did n't know they were in my mind. One of them put a large damp hand over my mouth. I bit it." She paused and regarded us defensively.

"I understand now what makes them fight policemen and kick stewards of meetings and chain themselves to railings. It goes to your head — like — Wagner," she finished vaguely.

"Oh," she cried suddenly, "did you ever hear of anything so silly. The fool I've been. *That* help women! How could I make such a fool of myself? Kicking policemen in petticoats and thin shoes!" She laughed abruptly. "That poor woman. Towards the end she thought I was a malicious fiend. The last time I saw her she was limping after the 'bus that runs down Park Lane — all rags and ends of hair — crying and wiping at her tears with her gloves. 'I'll never come out with you again,' she said. As if she had n't started it all." Margaret poked absently at the fire. "I thought once what a silly game it all was — this governors' game of bluffing with policemen, and putting large damp hands across your mouth. It seemed almost cruel to call

the bluff. Somebody shrieked 'Cossacks' at them. Cossacks! Poor, bewildered, perspiring, angry men, chasing women off the grass, twisting their wrists. And the one I bit . . ."

Mick interrupted rashly. "Hanging on to the vote by the skin of your teeth —"

She turned on him. "It had nothing to do with the vote — all that. Nor freedom, nor anything. It was just kicking about in petticoats. What a fool — Oh Lord, what a fool!"

She was moodily bad-tempered for the whole of the evening. Once I caught a wry face as she sat pretending to read her *Beowulf*, that lupine futility of an Anglo-Saxon saga. I think she was tasting policeman. Just before supper she got up and went out alone and returned near midnight, tired out and serene, having been to Isleworth on the 'bus.

I remember now the spasm of fury that seized me at the sight of that slender bruised arm.

CHAPTER XI

WE formed the habit of meeting once a week to talk and smoke. There would be a dozen of us, all students at King's: we met in the common room or in our Herne Hill rooms. Though Mick dominated these talks, we were always conscious of the strain and tug of two other personalities, bitterly and instinctively hostile to each other. Of all those bold debaters, Chamberlayn and Kersent alone remain with the standards of their hot youth. Boyle returned to South Africa: he went in on the wrong side in the miners' strike, gaining wealth and damnation thereby. Seumas O'Donnell married ships and took his wit to lighten the austerities of the Dublin Castle party: I think he is bored and repentant, and no one will take back his silver pieces. But Chamberlayn and Kersent will never now turn traitor or grow old.

Kersent's bitterness was older than he was. It had lived with his father since he first came to Walthamstow, a raw lad, squeezed out of his native village because its noble owner liked building stables better than cottages. The two-legged cattle had therefore to get out when they arrived at marriageable age, taking their vulgar and inconvenient passions with them.

The lower humans are lacking in self-control and self-respect: they will litter as readily on a gentleman's estate as in a filthy slum. They continue to be prolific when decency and necessity are alike against their folly. What is to be done with such cattle? Clear them off the land. The noble landlord writes to the papers on the falling birth-rate. Pray continue to breed, my dear creatures, we need you in the factories, on the docks, and in the bloody trenches. But not on my estate! Is it a warren or a sty? God forbid! But continue, my brave fellows. Heroes as well as blacklegs, are born in foetid slums. We have need of both to keep our smiling land for us. To keep our land smiling for US.

Kersent was born two months after his father's marriage and arrival in London. This mishap delayed his college course by three years.

In his eighteenth year a philanthropic religieuse interested herself in the pale studious boy. She offered to pay his fees at any college of London University, asking only to be satisfied of his respectability. When her investigations discovered the disgraceful circumstance of his birth, she withdrew with her offer, her interest, and the wild hopes she had raised, tumbling Kersent disdainfully off her opulent lap, back into the mud where she had found him. He said that in his despair he wanted to kill himself. He laughed queerly as he told us this.

"I'm a nice specimen of manhood, don't you think?" he said, twisting himself round before the glass over our mantelshelf. He passed his hand down the reflection. The thin, livid face under its sheaf of colorless hair nodded sardonically back at him. The deep-set ironic eyes glanced down over narrow chest and bent shoulders.

"I was always pale and skinny," he said, "but not like this — hunched and done-for. This is what I've paid for college. I taught all day and studied all night. Four years it took me to get the fees together. I am done for, you know," he added, in the constrained silence. "Played out. I have n't the stamina of a louse. I'm twenty-four, but I look forty, eh?"

He was taking Psychology. Chadding, his professor, said that Kersent was the finest psychologist he had had through his hands in thirty years. He held out glowing promises. The deep-rooted irony peered out of Kersent's eyes.

"Do you think his moral scruples will let him keep his promises?" he asked us. "If he goes sniffing after marriage and birth certificates, I mean."

"Those people have more sense than that," I told him.

"Have they?" he said in his soft melancholy voice. "What makes you think that? If they are so wise, why don't they see that I sha'n't live to finish my college course if I don't get out of that damned Walthamstow court?" A gentle smile twisted his mouth. "That paunchy, feather-trimmed old moralist dropped me because I was conceived in sin. Old Chadding asked me to

dinner once. His wife did n't like my coming in morning dress. He has n't asked me since."

We admired Kersent. We could not help admiring the obstinate will in his frail body, and the terrible incisive skill in analysis that made him dreaded in debate. But we never got from admiration to affection. Something in Kersent repelled us. I don't know if it were simply that there was nothing in him to kindle to the warmth in us. He might have been frozen, so that the fumbling tendrils of friendliness were chilled and dead before they touched him. Or it might have been that all the positive powers of his personality were deflected to the shielding and fostering of the genius he felt in him, leaving only a negative repellant aspect for other men. God knows he had every reason for his self-centered passion.

However it may be, he was always in our circle, a lonely, puzzling figure. He talked and listened to us with the pale reflection on his face of a smile that was somehow turned inward. He seemed to smile at himself in a melancholy and ironic solitude. We fought against a dislike of him. Only Mick poured out before him an ardor of praise and affection. He thrust upon Kersent all the attributes of strength and surety that he felt lacking in himself. Kersent was his idol, his mysterious, compelling sphinx. He forced Kersent at us until our latent dislike became almost active.

One man made no secret of his dislike. Chamberlayn frankly hated Kersent. He could never argue with him, for he lost his temper under Kersent's rapier thrusts and flung away his argument in a flurry of wrath. I suppose there was something nakedly personal in their antagonism. Kersent hated Chamberlayn's class with a cold, quiet hatred, more dangerous and more bitter than any wild crying. Such hatreds are the icy mountain springs that pour down into the spumy torrent of revolution. He hated Chamberlayn and despised him. I do not believe that he envied him for a minute: his scorn was too stern for that. And Chamberlayn was studiously careful to keep any hint of class prejudice out of his wildest argument.

Yet I daresay he had an unconscious sense that Kersent was the latest and most deadly of the forces arrayed against his class and all that it stood for in prejudice and self-esteem. Chamber-

layn was the last of a family that came down in an unwinking radiance of prestige and honor from the remote easy ancestor whose wife had pleased a king. Kersent was the emerging intellect of the servile classes to which that prestige and honor had hitherto opposed an arrogant front. Unconsciously, Chamberlayn sensed a conqueror. Discontent, greed, misery—all such diseases and stirrings of these servile classes could be met and defeated. But its awakening intellect—never. That was immortal. It might be numbed by poverty and misled by false dawns, but not killed.

What Chamberlayn felt unconsciously, Kersent knew. He had been subjected to the numbing process. He resented it, and he despised Chamberlayn.

Jack Chamberlayn was a professed democrat. His father had been for sending him to Oxford.

"But I would n't go," he said. "I wanted to have a decent chance in life. They started me badly enough. My Aunt Jane paid for me at Eton. You know, it's very fine and jolly and all that—but they hold and teach you a tradition altogether at variance with modern life. Life has changed, and women have changed since the tradition was made, but their attitude to these things has n't changed at all. I don't see how the older public schools can ever be changed. Seems to me they will just have to be side-tracked. Pity they had n't been side-tracked in time to save me. I've got their spirit in my blood. I could never rid myself of it now. What could I have done—the son of a pauper Duke—if I'd been educated at Oxford, but let myself be boosted into the diplomatic service? And there I'd have blundered, with neither the brains nor the inclination for the peculiar type of lying required of me, until maybe I'd blundered the whole world into a war. I'd have had to live in a foreign capital with a lot of jabbering foreigners, and dance attendance on pot-bellied, starred and gartered fools and amateur Napoleons in petticoats, eaten up and bedizened with vanity. God, what a life.

"I've always wanted to do things with my hands," he added shyly. "I'll build a bridge perhaps."

So he had come to King's—to give himself a chance. He tried

and wearied of several socialists and socialist groups before he stumbled on us, or we on him. Indeed, when we first noticed him, he was arguing in the Common Room with a Fabian.

"You're neither one thing nor the other," he was saying. "Don't you see that you can't have all the pretty graces of a Versailles civilization in a democratic state? You've got to choose. Democracy can be a lot of beautiful and fine things, but it can't be an aristocracy."

The Fabian was stammering a little, overawed by the godhead in a Duke's son. We bore down in our overbearing way, and elbowed him off the stage.

"Scornst thou that man?" Anthony cried. "How we love you."

Chamberlayn turned and began to explain to us eagerly his scheme for reforming society by an alliance of Tory and Socialist.

But, apart from the democratic aberrations in him, it was hard to say just what had made Chamberlayn a member of our group. We prided ourselves on a hatred of the established disorder. Chamberlayn, frankly, could see no disorder that a few wise reforms would not right. He had a single-eyed faith in the civilizing influence of the British Empire. He wanted the lower classes to be thrifty and have clean homes and receive a decency of food and learning. He thought that if Radical parliamentarians, brewers and stockbrokers, could be reduced to a proper subservience to the Conservative party, that party would shine out in wisdom and beneficence on all men, black and white, who toiled and paid taxes under the good British sun. "You've got to help us, you socialists," he said. "You know things we don't: we can lead as you can't."

Kersent thrust venomously at what he called this bric-a-brac socialism. "You got it out of the Wells bran-tub," he said. "Don't you ever think for yourself?"

The taunt was just enough. Chamberlayn took his ideas straight over from the best authorities; that is to say, from those who disturbed him least. He liked above all things to know where he stood. He liked to think what the best people thought. He turned a resolute back upon all that might shake his belief

that things were as he thought they should be in a decent god-fearing world wherein wives respected their husbands, children were round limbed and healthy, maidens all pure, men all anxious to deal fairly by each other — if only they were not hindered and confused by cranks, agitators and Radicals. We laughed at him: we got angry, and stormed at him. But it was all to no purpose. He had persuaded himself that all tended towards the best in a good world, and towards the best he saw it tend.

Our weekly meetings were rent asunder by his futile, hot-mouthed quarrels with Kersent. Sometimes we got them precariously on to common ground, but Chamberlayn could not long forbear tilting at Kersent, nor Kersent from pricking Chamberlayn's prancing ardor. We fumbled our way through their quarrels to a definite idea of what we might do to help the world to the millennium.

We hung for a time in the outskirts of a rather conscious self-scorn. There was so much to do, and we seemed to do nothing. We filled up the time with hearty abuse of a decrepit society. We were to be the new Eikonoklasts, and under that bombastic standard talked and swaggered until we were brought up sharply by one of Kersent's poisoned barbs, and collapsed deflated. Youth and arrogance blew us out again, and off we sailed.

"This world," Mick said, "is run by dead men, horrid hairy men like the Rev. Strut, who cluck in their throats and put heavy flat hands on your heads. How that old beast loathed us: you could see his loathing in his little red eyes, and yet we never set out to annoy him. He just came to hating us because we were young, and did n't believe in him any more. You remember that sly-mouthed, slithering son of his — scared to death of the Reverend, and relieving himself in all sorts of dirty pranks out of the reverent sight. If I had a son like that I'd hold his head under water until he choked. When Chamberlayn's an old man he'll oppress his sons, only he'll do it in a dignified, upright sort of way that they won't be able to kick against."

"Don't you want your sons to respect you?" Chamberlayn said.

"No. I don't. Why the devil should they? What is there to respect in dried-up shanks and white hair? They can respect

my work — if I've done any — and I hope they'll treat me kindly for the sake of it."

Chamberlayn shrugged. "I don't understand you," he said carelessly. "I think you're only talking."

"Of course you don't, dear man. You were born to be respected, and a ruler of men. Your sort does actually rule. You simply can't feel how unjust and beastly things are. And if you do, you deceive yourself into thinking that it's all for the best, that the poor and dirty are a natural balance to the rich and beautiful, and it must be their own fault if they've got no bath-room and God will reward 'em for it anyway. You could n't rule or live comfortably if you did n't deceive yourself like that. You'd turn traitor to your own class, and then they'd fall on you and kick your corpse into the river . . ."

"It's not his fault," Kersent put in maliciously. "His psychology is still somewhere in the early feudal stages. It runs in blinkers. He has the idea of a wonderful, beneficent ruling class with the common herd clustering trustfully round — learning to read at mother's knee, so to speak. His mind is so full of a golden haze that he just can't see that life never was like that, nor ever will be. In a dim sort of way, he knows there's blood and misery, but he thinks the blood flows to manure the ground and the misery is sent to purge the spirit . . ."

"I do know where I stand," Chamberlayn cried hotly, "and that's more than you do. If my world is all out of drawing, yours is a nebulous mess."

"It must be wonderful to have things so sharp and clear," Mick said softly. "To know what the world ought to be like and then to see it so. To lean like a tired child on the broad bosom of tradition, and be there lulled to sleep. Cradle Song by chorus of bankers and merchant princes — 'The world is fair and round and full of juice. We'll squeeze it while it purrs its happiness. Hush-a-bye, baby, up in a tree: Grow up and work for wifie and me.'"

Kersent sat smiling to himself. "Chamberlayn's wise. He's very wise and old. He has all the wisdom of his fathers. Don't you see that if his mind responded at all to the changes in life he could n't deal with life in the broad, simple fashion of your

great statesman? It's to the interest of those in power to keep things as they are. The old wolf likes the pack to run in the old known ways. Old men like old familiar things. New things, strange, disturbing things, shake them and destroy their self-confidence. They don't know how to adapt themselves to a new order: they tremble for their power. All change is associated with a troubling sense of insecurity. And they count on this. They say — 'Don't go shifting about: you'll upset the boat. The bottom will come out, and you can't swim.' And there they go, pretending that the timbers are n't rotten and quivering — until one day the whole thing will drop to pieces and we shall all be floundering in an uncharted sea."

A faint flush appeared over his high cheek bones. He gazed at Chamberlayn, and spoke in a winning, almost a beseeching voice. "Can't you see you're on the wrong side?" he said. "You're young, but you're ranging yourself with the old withered men. You just won't give to experience. You deny the evidence your senses bring before your brain. You *are* the very forces that keep the world in chaos. You are allied with the men who see only what they want to see, because it would be bad for business if they saw the real thing. Just let me describe to you one roomful of people — one room in a million such rooms. It is in a house in the court where I live. There are six people in it. They eat, sleep, and perform every act of life in full view of each other. Behind that screen is the bed where the father and mother sleep with the two youngest children. As you see, the screen is dusty and full of holes — a skeleton of a screen. When the last child was born it was night time. The man went and stood outside in the pouring rain, and two young children sat up in their bed to watch the affair. Next day, when the nurse went in to wash the woman, she had to reach across the man to get at her. He was on a night shift at the docks. He was dog tired and it was his bed. His wages, by the way, don't keep his family even in that one room: he is a casual laborer. In strike time, he blacklegs until he dare n't do it any longer. The woman goes out charring most days a week. She locks the children out, and last year one of them was knocked down and killed in the gutter by a dray. That made room for the next. The

eldest girl is sixteen. She works in a jam factory. Her wages don't keep her: she makes them up by intermittent prostitution. I have seen her sick with weariness."

Kersent's voice was suddenly very gentle. "Oh," he said, "you think I've taken the worst place I ever saw. But it is not so. There are rooms worse than that. Rooms where girls and boys in their teens have to share a bed. Rooms where the vermin eat the children. I don't tell you of these things. I don't want to sicken you." The pleading in his voice hurt me. I wanted to get away from it. We listened like men in a trance. "Don't you see," he said, his burning eyes still fixed on Chamberlayn, "don't you see that these things are n't accidents? They're inevitable: they follow directly from the arrangement of the world as old, old, hide-bound men have ordered it. They are in the tradition! The tradition breeds cruelty. You can't get away from it. Your beautiful lawns and spacious houses are built on that room. The hems of soft white gowns are spattered in blood. The blood and the cruelty are what you have *wished*."

Chamberlayn cried out harshly. "Now you are lying. Now you are unjust. Who has wished it? What decent man would wish such things?"

He seemed to appeal to the rest of us.

Kersent laughed softly. He leaned back in his chair: the mocking ironical note was back in his voice.

"Now, you're getting beyond me," he said. "What is decency and which of us is the decent man? It has been considered decent to eat your grandmother, let alone marry her. Of course, I know you are convinced that the decencies of English family life were ordained by God on a hill in Palestine. They hang in the empyrean, like Plato's Ideal Values. They were born in full Anglican canonicals. An honorable man is very sound on the commandments. He bathes in cold water every morning, and morality is all very simple and fine and manly. I suppose it is—for you. Black is black, and white is white, and you know what you think, eh? Your sort of mind does n't run any risk of mental anguish and indecision. The throes of birth are the first agony it will have to endure, and most likely you will die before reaching that disastrous stage."

Half an hour later we were jolting across Waterloo Bridge on the bus. "I should n't wonder," Mick said, "if I dreamed to-night that I was skulking about outside the Garden of Eden and the angel with the flaming sword had a moth-eaten beard and cleared his throat in a horrid shameless fashion before wheezing at me to move on."

I stretched myself lazily. "Look how the shadows play with the little pools of moonlight in the water, shaking them from one hand to the other, making patterns and breaking them. You would n't be able to tell that there was a moon in London if it were n't for the river."

CHAPTER XII

KERSENT told us of the days when he studied and taught to scrape together his college fees.

"I loathed teaching," he said, "and I was a bad teacher. The sickening repetition of it, emptying oneself into thirty wriggling bodies and thirty dull minds. I could n't stand it. I used to lose my temper and be sarcastic. I killed what bit of enthusiasm they had for their work. I knew I was doing it, but I could n't help it. And then at night, raking together the pieces of my brain, I tried to blow life and eagerness into them. I have worked till the gray light coming over the blind slit itself into a hundred stabbing darts that pierced my head. Crown of thorns, you know. I used to reel and be sick. And the time I wasted over useless stuff! I had no help. The evening classes were no use to me. The only creature I could ask for advice was my headmaster, and he was as much use as a rotten stick. I suppose he had had some education, but he'd either forgotten it, or it had made no impression on him. He was positively illiterate. I've heard him say to a boy — 'Come 'ere, you young brat, you. I'll learn you, I'll make an exemplar of you.' He did his best for me. He lent me a debauched-looking Shakespeare, and he used to recommend me vaguely to read the standard works. 'Get a groundwork,' he said. 'Read Green's 'istory, and a 'istory of lityrtoor. The flummery can wait.' I went to the local library on my way from school, and chose books by their titles. As like as not, when I got them home, they were useless. I'd read them all the same: I was afraid to miss one of them out. I did n't trust myself to know the real thing when I saw it. Now and then I'd buy a book, but only after I had had a good look through it.

"I'll not forget going into a West End book shop and asking to see a book with a title that made me think it was a philosophical treatise. It was nothing of the kind, but the shop was so large and I so conscious of my shabby clothes and the scornful assistant that I bought it. Going home I chucked the beastly

thing in the gutter, and I cried and sniffed over my tea to think of the wasted money."

He looked at us with his gentle smile. "Instructor of the young in tears for his sins," he said. And a few minutes later, in a musing tone — "I'd have sold my soul to any dull devil in those days for a little decent guidance."

"There must have been plenty of men at college then who'd have helped you gladly," I said rather helplessly.

"Could I have gone and asked them?"

We hung for a minute over that.

"We change," Kersent mused, "but our environment does n't. Look at my father. In his village he lived in a two-roomed, rose-grown hovel. He still lives in two rooms. He can't imagine himself in any better place. I am supposed to be content with the same two rooms — or at most, a workman's model dwelling — and to get children with like manageable desires. I've killed myself because my desires were n't manageable. I'm a freak, a degenerate. My family will die off in me. The world has no use for me because I had no use for the life it offered me. Down where I live," he said quietly, "there are thousands of men whose desires are unmanageable — out of proportion to their station. Don't you think there will come a time when they on their part will have no use for the world, but will rise and destroy it, good and bad alike? Rulers shut their eyes and try blind pressure: the keenest of them make little safety valves. They don't see the incredible danger they are courting. They'll die in their blindness. But sooner or later disaster will come: one way or another it will come. They say men will perish as the sun grows cold. The poor last of mankind, savages with no Renaissance below the iron sky, will crouch in caves until the last human breath goes out on the frigid air. For my part, I believe that if men do not soon awake to the need of consciously directing their progress, they will disappear long before the sun does. There will be more and more men like me — freaks with unmanageable desires. Until in the end the desires will crack and destroy the imperfect life. And since mankind is the world's greatest disaster, I don't suppose there will be found even a very little devil to mourn the loss of Balder, the hairless ape . . ."

CHAPTER XIII

ONCE, on his way from college, Kersent saw a young girl step clumsily from a moving 'bus. She fell sideways with a sprained ankle. He took her to her home in Leyton, and had from her an awkward letter of thanks and an invitation to tea. He forgot the letter. Finding it two months later between the pages of a book, he felt an impulse to make apologies. He called at the house in Leyton, and was received with pleasure and reproach.

The girl's name was Ruth. She taught in an elementary school. Her mother had been a rheumatic cripple for many years, and her father was writing a book on sylphs. He explained to Kersent that the air was inhabited by several orders of beings, of whom the sylphs were the lowest and least intelligent. They were none the less attractive, and their stupidity was only relative to their celestial nature. In reality, their intelligence was so little superior to our own that men could hold profitable converse with them. An older sister shared with Ruth the privilege of supporting the sylphomaniac and his wife.

Kersent made several calls at the house. He had discovered in himself an undeveloped vanity. He played with Ruth's admiration as Montaigne with his cat, and had the same questioning satisfaction therein. Ruth became his mistress. Her mother regarded the situation with sardonic amusement. Her father, his eyes turned celestially, remained in ignorance of it. The sylph morality was itself so doubtful that there is no need to suppose his disapproval.

Kersent forgot the girl for months together. Remembering her at odd times, he would take himself to the house at Leyton for a week-end. He found her always the same, placidly reproachful of his neglect, placidly happy in his remembrance.

I had tea with them once at Ruth's home. The mother sat in her chair, a shapeless hulk of clothes, topped by a smooth pink

face. She seemed to have sucked in cheerfulness from every other member of the family. She thrust her barbed wit at Kersent, and treated Ruth with contemptuous kindliness. I thought that she had said to herself—"Since I cannot go to the play, I will have the play staged on my own hearthstone, but it is a poor show after all, and poorly acted. If I were not there myself, how bored I should be."

The older sister was eaten up by hatred of Kersent. She could hardly look at him in patience, but flitted about the room, glowering upon him from unexpected angles. This also amused the mother, and her amusement awoke a dumb rage in the girl's eyes.

I did not at this time understand Kersent's relations with Ruth, but I guessed at them. Later in the evening, a paunchy, middle-aged man came in and sat staring at her with an air miserably indulgent of her caprice. He was a chemist. He appeared to be suffering tortures, and the sardonic cripple in the rocking-chair aggravated them with skilful spite. I began to see things clearly.

The father tried to talk to Kersent. "How goes philosophy these days?" he said absently. "Sweet philosophy, the pastime of the gods."

His wife nodded her head. "Oh, don't ask him that. He finds her the rarest mistress in the world. She never complains and he never neglects her." She chuckled and rocked.

Ruth blushed, and her sister trotted agitatedly round the room.

Kersent smiled at the rocking malice. He never resented nor retorted upon her. A tenuous affection existed between them. I felt suddenly that the mocking elf in the twisted body was somehow kin to the smiling elf of irony in Kersent. I had the preposterous idea that Kersent had made Ruth his mistress because it amused her mother.

"What makes you think philosophy a woman?" he said.

She twisted her face into a grimacing mask. "Who but a woman would draw so infatuated a host of lovers?"

"Circe—" her husband began.

"Circe made swine of her lovers," she interrupted, "though it would have been more fitting if she'd made them goats and apes. La Filosofia takes out her lovers' hearts and turns their brains

into wheels to spin the moonshine. Oh, a very fine sorceress. Don't tell me the gods made a pastime of her. They had more sense on Olympus."

"Juno —"

She flung up her hands. "Don't talk to me about the hussy."

At eight o'clock the chemist sighed heavily and prepared to go.

"Good-night," she said, and — "Since you can't cure me, could n't you make me a little simple thing like a love-philter?"

"Ah, if only I could!"

She laughed delightedly at his face of a stricken cow.

I left soon afterwards, but Kersent stayed on.

He did not visit Ruth for some months. Then she wrote to him. She was to undergo a small operation, and with half-pitiful cunning, tried to call up a tragic vision. He showed me the letter.

"My dear," she wrote, "I do not at all think I shall die. But, sometimes I suppose these things go wrong. I would not like to think — as I went under the chloroform — that I had hidden anything from you. If I were to die . . . Sometimes, when I think of you, you seem a stranger, who has come coldly into my life, and taken all I had to give. You have taken it almost without recognizing the gift. You come, and I have you, and then you go again for weeks and months. At first, when you never came and never wrote, I thought I should go mad. I tried to pretend that I had never known you, but I could n't do that. I could n't be the old Ruth. The new Ruth was restless and dissatisfied. I went about my work on fire for you. There came a time when, if I had wished, I might have taken the easiest way to forget you. There is no need for me to write the man's name. He did not count with me. But one night I sat with him in the firelight. His eyes were on me. I felt a madness creeping over my limbs. Just for a minute, I gave way to wicked desires. I had only to lift my eyes . . . Oh, it was only a mood, but I had to tell you of it — now. I ran away and left him. He never knew —"

I gave Kersent the letter. "Poor Ruth."

"Don't you see the magnificent insincerity?" he said quietly. "She'd never have so accurately remembered a mere mood, if

there had n't been something bigger connected with it. I daresay she invented the whole tale, so that by confessing to a passing desire she would get relief for some — treachery — that she dare n't confess. Treachery is a silly word. But I wonder who it was. The chemist, I suppose. Her mother would know. How the old satyr must have reveled in it! She might have shared the jest."

He did not go near Ruth again. Even when her mother died he did not go. He seemed to resent the old woman's miserly treatment of him in the matter of that jest she had not shared. "She will laugh to find herself free of her old hulk of a body," he said, and added grudgingly — "I'm sorry she died."

I had forgotten them, and remember them now so well that I am reluctant to let them go. They have waited so long for me to blow life into them again — gentle Ruth, and her vengeful sister, and the laughing cripple, and even the chemist.

I regret particularly the chemist, that good, paunchy man, for I am convinced that he is full of citizen-like virtues and votes on the right side in elections.

I do not think that Kersent ever loved anything in his life — unless it were the jade Humanity.

CHAPTER XIV

I HAVE tried to explain what we owed to the accident of spending our student days in London. At first, no doubt, we were simply bewildered provincials. We wandered up Southampton Row into the yellow, greasy squalor of Euston Road and through that to the big houses round Regents' Park. We could not see how either endured the existence of the other. Beyond Ealing Common we came upon miles and miles of horrible villas, full of black, frock-coated little animals and incredible, scurrying hordes of their mates, fed from the ill-stocked, fly-haunted, dusty shops of shopkeepers who cannot afford even to be clean. And then, all about Hyde Park and Kensington Gardens, the great houses with their hierarchies of attendants, maids, valets, hair-dressers, and a few steps away, jewelers, florists, court dress-makers — all the busy, elaborate machinery that turns and turns and makes nothing at all. We boggled at the chaotic immensity of wealthy London and the anti-climax of the east end, trailing furtively to the docks and the gray river.

We had peculiar opportunities to cultivate our intellectual snobbery. Chamberlayn's father was the most poverty-stricken Duke in England. The Cleveland estate was let to Lacquered Goods; the St. James' house was sold, lock, stock, and barrel to an American who got a bad bargain, for the vast, inconvenient basement was eaten up with cockroaches, and not one of the pictures was genuine. Even the Adams fireplace was a fake.

The Duke kept for himself a dark little house in one of the byeways of Mayfair, and he did not often use that. A cousin of fabulous age lived in it, and behind closed windows preserved carefully an atmosphere of dried rose leaves and old leather. The Duke himself had two rooms in an hotel in Liverpool, and there he posed for incoming Americans. He came to the Kensington cottage now and then. The old satyr had taken a fancy to Margaret. He was kind to us and took us into houses we should

not have seen without him. Doors opened to that raddled old sinner that were still closed to the Lacquered Goods and the Beer Barons. And the more we saw, the more we were perplexed and doubtful. What possible scheme of life, what high vision could sweep in and hold together the complacent stupidity of Putney and the starved, instinctive stupidity of Bethnal Green?

We had been too well and truly brought up not to know that it was our duty to feel like this about London. .

It was, after all, the Duke who played Lucina to our laboring minds. There was some vague talk of Disestablishment, and he had come up, he said, to flagellate the Bishops. He was standing gloomily regarding the imitation stone facade of his house in St. James' when I made some careless remark on his attitude to the Church. He surprised me by a queer, cracked vehemence. "The traitors," he said, "the filthy, time-serving traitors. Look at my house, given over to nasal snobs, and my birds being shot at picnic parties with champagne and giggling women. There was a time when the Church and the old families ran together. We boosted them up, and they made us out a little lower than the Almighty. Then you knew where you were: we were the top and head of the building. People looked up to us. We had the books and the pictures and the fine houses and the parks. Things centered on us. All these Beer and Buns people knew their places then. We were respected. And before you knew where you were, beastly little houses shot up at your very doors and the towns ran amuck all over the country with factories and business houses, and working-men's clubs and bed and breakfast for five bob including the palm court and hot water installed in all the bedrooms."

I tried to get him back to the Anglican treachery. "What they done?" he said. "Well, what han't they done? Traf-ficking with Socialists. Letting up on hell-fire. Encouraging grocers and bank clerks to think their souls as good as mine. Hobnobbin' with Beer and Buns, and all because the money was slipping into their hands and they were sneaking into our houses and peacocking around in our clothes. They've got the top story now, but there ain't any bottom to it. The bottom's fallen out, only they don't know it, going parrotting away above there,

thinking no 'un could tell them from us. After a bit the Bishops 'ull fall through, and then Beer and Buns on top of 'em, splosh on their great bellies, God be thanked."

Strange rhetorical noises rose in his throat and strangled his speech. It balked and then came with a fine sweep. "After the old nobility the Church will go, and after the Church the ignobility of Beer and Bluff." He seemed pleased with the phrase, and I discovered afterwards that he was quoting from an article he had written in a penny weekly of the baser class. He did this sort of thing, and he also sat on Welfare Committees and Maternity Centers and things of that kind. They had his aristocratic company and he had a good lunch and expenses allowed. One of them cut down the expenses to half and there were actually tears in the poor old scoundrel's eyes when he told us.

There was not a little mental humbugging in our concern with the sociological aspect of London, due, I daresay, to a too prolonged course in sociological novels and pamphlets thrust upon us when our minds were at their most impressionable stage.

We developed a kind of imaginative Fabianism. We insisted on pigeon-holing London, and regarding our intellectual sleight-of-hand as an achievement.

The structure of things, and all the outward show, belongs to the eighteenth century. The big estates are still there, fenced off. The shops still make pretense of catering for exclusive tastes. The thing looks the same — dignified Churchmen, fine ladies, subtler and subtler private magnificences — but the heart is gone out of it. It means nothing now. The powers above, that stood in our sight once for national traditions and a fine spacious outlook, stand now for nothing but profits squeezed from common needs, kept up by newspaper jingoisms and shameless scheming and self-advertisements. The new powers have scrambled into castles and Mayfair houses that are built out over — nothing. The older feudal hierarchy of class has crumbled away beneath them. Below the white-sleeved bishops are now only empty churches and indifferent, scornful crowds: below Beer and Buns an ever-increasing and incalculable ferment of discontents, strivings, and insecure pretenses.

We could see also a lateral cleavage in the general upheaval and subsidence of the social revolution that followed the industrial one and shook our old Duke from his great house and his feudal security.

The line of partition runs somewhere through the middle classes. Above it are what are called the upper middle classes, fairly prosperous families, employing three or four or more servants, professional men, secretaries, clerks of the nobler sort. These believe in Beer and Buns as those mighty ones do not believe in themselves, work for Beer and Buns, draw salaries and philosophies therefrom. Their wives join in the conspiracy to assume the permanence of Beer and Buns, dress themselves to look more like Beer than Lady B—— does, take in illustrated papers which show them how to achieve the Beer effect at an infinitesimal fraction of the Beer income, talk Beer, court and marry and pray Beer; assume, in fact, that the only difference between them and Beer is an illusory and non-essential difference of money, always capable of readjustment by some lucky accident or unforeseen opportunity, Putney and Croydon and Dulwich are all given over to this Beer cult. We traced it down through less and less pretentious suburbs and more pitiful, shoddy, and spiritless reflections of Beer until we arrived again at the crushing vulgarity of Ealing. And we wondered whether they would all perish with Beer, loyal and slow-witted devotees, or save themselves at the last.

Below the line of cleavage comes a vast mass of men and women moving slowly towards a sharper and more conscious antagonism to Beer. The shams and affectations of those others simply do not exist in their ungracious and unlovely lives. They keep themselves in a grim respectability, too near the underworld to forget the need of that. They are as intensely stupid as the others, and even more bigoted and warped in spirit.

And yet, nothing more important has happened to the human race since the first speck of life moved and moved again, creeping blindly in the mud, than is happening now in the restless stirrings of these very lives, lived without leisure or security or any beautiful and spacious thing. Half unaware of their power, too often thwarted and led wrong by craven and interested

guides, they invite and get no help save from a handful of men, longer-sighted or less class-loyal than their kind. Your palpably loyal and healthy-minded citizen, glancing reluctantly at what he calls the masses, distinguishes between the commendably thrifty and the wantonly agitated and perverse. Farther than that he dare not go, without grave risk to his mental health. It might even become necessary for him to think.

And we looked at these thwarted, strenuous lives and had the preposterous, childish audacity to sneer at them. We sat up o' nights and wondered what sort of a social order would be fathered by uneducated slaves and sponsored by labor leaders. To be sure, we swung later, in the inspiration of the Scheme, to an enthusiasm as ill-advised as our scorn. Not that there was any scanting in the advice thrust upon us. The Scheme was indeed near suffocated and over-lain by advice.

CHAPTER XV

YOU would be grievously misled if you imagined that we spent the whole of our time wandering round London in a state of intellectual frenzy.

We found it difficult to get rid of a suspicion that we were rather priggishly-minded in this social concern of ours. It did not preclude an enjoyment of life that might find expression in kicking a tin can all the way through the tarnished gentility of Denmark Hill to Camberwell Green, or set us scouring London for a cheap copy of a coveted book, or keep us on our weary feet at promenade concerts or rare first nights. But it filled our thoughts to an extraordinary extent.

I suppose it takes as sharp a hold upon the thoughts of long-thinking youth in any condition of life. But when youth seeks a legitimate outlet for his desire of service there is none to his hand. The socialist societies of the day offer about as much attraction to his eagerness as a spent fire-balloon. Either he comes to them bearing his own fire, to burn itself out in an unintelligent huckstering of socialism in barren places. Or else he falls to wandering through his days in a fever of discontent, bemusing himself with a sociology borrowed from his reading, until the fever leaves him or is transmuted into something of more value to Trade. It is not given to many of us to marry money, enter Parliament, and inaugurate the Endowment of Motherhood.

The fever and the desire to serve existed once in the most respectable of us. Then how amazingly potent must be those social forces that make decent, orderly, obtuse and bat-eyed citizens of the ninety and nine of us! At what point does a man begin to pass from aching dissatisfaction with the injustice that obese old men call social progress to the for-god's-sake-hold-your-tongue-and-let-me-live attitude of successful middle-age? Does age bring about the happy change, or success, or the blind,

fearful pressure of the innumerable dead who struggled and failed before us, of the burdens we take on us — wives, children, houses, brick-dust and dirt? Is it because we are so timorous in the face of posterity that we go on introducing it into a dull and searing insecurity rather than outrage the decencies of modern life by telling the truth about it?

We would rather be left in the filth we are used to than adventure on an untried road with our train of helpless dependents. And so we rend the unbalanced altruist: and so we tell our earnest young men — “Ah, I thought so at your age, but when you get to mine, you will have other things to think about than Utopias” — and, gazing upon our deflated enthusiasms over an acquired convexity of frontage, we puff and wheeze ourselves to bed.

Even Mick felt the weight of the aged impotence that presses on every department of life, from the instinctive lisping of folk-lore to the accepted misinterpretations of history and the smearing of beauty by scuffling moralities. At the height of our earnestness we were pricked by a dread of making fools of ourselves. We did not want to appear priggish . . . We had caught the prevailing English horror of appearing to think about things. In England, marks of the effort of thought are commonly held to be undignified and unnecessary — almost indecent. Your well-bred politician producing his reforms — poor things that they are — does so in an offhand, gentlemanly way — “a little thing I thought of in an odd half-hour.” A man may rob and starve his fellow-men, thwart them of every joyous and beautiful thing, cheat them by lying hopes of heavenly bliss, ruin and spoil and demoralize, and be rewarded for it by the emulative respect of godly folk. But let him attempt to expose his fellows to the horrid anguish of thought, or drag Truth indecent from her decent well, and there is an end of him, so far as this world goes.

Or, for the matter of that, any other world peopled by the spirits of our neighbors. Sad that we are all fated to be neighbored by thick-skinned stupidity!

Should he have the good fortune to live until his ideas are stale and stingless, he may found a self-explanatory society or

edit a review, and find himself taken seriously when it no longer matters whether he rot above or below ground.

Or, like Mr. Shaw, he may disguise his earnestness by doing his own clowning. Or wink behind his gravity at his friends — like any successful politician — returning to the rich man in private what he has taken from him in public, an amiable and harmless Robin Hood. But to be in earnest, in or out of Parliament, without mitigating your madness by humor or mellowing it by compromise, is to stand self-accused of lack of breeding and an undisciplined mind.

In our ramblings round London, in our flushed and arrogant earnestness, we made the absurd and inevitable mistakes of inexperience. But where the border-line between the earnest and the priggish becomes shadowy, did we not save ourselves when we took refuge in the Scheme? I believe we did. Let us say that we did. We did not stop at words: we made an effort that was not entirely futile, though there is little to see now of aught it did. "Thoughts like swords —" Margaret said, hesitated, and left the phrase in a winged uncertainty. I believe the world has especial need of thoughts like swords. In our fumbling eagerness we were trying to think clean through perplexities that have baffled better heads than ours, broken better men. We made all kinds of fools of ourselves, but on the whole I am not ashamed of our follies.

It was inevitable that we should fall into follies other than the folly of believing in the possibility of social justice. I fell among the Jews, you remember — who were kinder to me than I merited.

CHAPTER XVI

LONDON dominated Mick from the first. Night after night he prowled about the streets, east to the docks, west to the swirling vibrant life of Regent Street and Piccadilly. Sometimes it excited him and he would come home and talk, waving his arms about: at other times he returned tired and depressed. During his first year he worked desperately hard, but discovering soon that he was far and away the best of the Physics men, he gave way to fits of unbroken indolence.

He would sit in the easiest chair with one leg over the arm, his vile, bubbly pipe in his mouth, and abuse Bergson and the Sidney Webbs until I had to take my books and study upstairs. He made of science a kind of fairyland through which his mind trailed clouds of iridescent speculation and thrust pathways to the stars.

He wasted our time as well as his own, for he had a knack of inveigling attention for the wildest of the schemes and notions that flourished in his brain. I do not mean that he was one of your scientific dilettantes, dabbling in a kitchen chemistry or scraping up enough biology to produce horrid hybrid psychologies of the pithecoïd type. He had a deeper and infinitely more intelligent knowledge of his work than that of the ordinary clever student. His professors were gravely encouraging. Towards the end of his third year they promised a scholarship at Cambridge, and later still the idea of a Fellowship appeared from somewhere and took a definite place in his vision of the future. There seemed to be no limit to the success he might achieve if only he did not abandon himself to one of the whims that took periodic hold on his imagination.

At one time he agreed with a wealthy agricultural student that they would emigrate to California and a fruit farm, to grow the fruit of gods in electrified soil. Their plans were minutely elaborated before Mick wearied of the scheme.

Another caprice almost ended badly. I wonder how many

people knew or remember Bronterre Gascoyne? He was that hairy, wild Irishman who burst upon London society from some remote Atlantic creek. With several rich women, an odd Duchess or two, and a few men a little less mad than himself, he took a suite of rooms in a west end hotel and prepared to open communications with the guardian spirits of the next world. He seemed to know them intimately. I forget where Mick met him — probably at some house where he had gone with Jack Chamberlayn and the Duke. He flung himself into the old maniac's schemes with enthusiasm, and readily agreed to converse with Aldabeezar III, the Guardian of the Intel. For a whole fortnight he fasted on a rusk and a glass of water a day. Then Gascoyne dosed him with some drug that took instantaneous and fearful effect upon him. He told us afterwards that he seemed to be thinking at an incredible rate. His thoughts mounted up in a spiral of white flame to a point of dazzling light, and there burst into fiery rays.

The onlookers saw nothing but the rapid dilation of Mick's pupils until his face was a white mask with eyes that burned in their sockets. Then he flung up his arms and dropped like a stone. He was still unconscious when they brought him home. We called in a doctor who accused us in his bewilderment of making fool experiments with some stuff from a college lab. We had time to become half-crazed with anxiety before Mick recovered and struggled to sit up.

"Well, I'll be damned," he said, as light came slowly back. "When I get used to that stuff I'll be able to live in the next era and think in Mars. Those Guardian Spirits are the boys, take my word for it."

Bronterre Gascoyne died three months later, just in time to escape a madhouse. Mick bought himself a black tie and a black, watered silk ribbon for his eyeglass.

"I'm sorry he's dead," he said. "He was an interesting beast, but altogether too optimistic for this world."

It was during the fortnight of fasting and initiation that Mick's Physics lecturer stopped me in the upper corridor of King's. He made a few wandering remarks, eyeing me absently the while, and then came abruptly to his point.

"I wish you'd drop a word in season to that brother of yours, Hearne. He's quite a good man — I might say, an exceptionally good man. But there's an idea getting about that he's not Sound. It's fatal, of course, for an idea like that to get about among the people who can do things for him. If he wants to get on he must be Sound, and he must let them know that he is. If you can drop a hint — he'd take it better from you. Most interesting, these new experiments of Sir Julian's. What d'you say?" He turned and stalked nervously away.

I repeated the conversation to Mick. He opened his eyes and smiled like a young cat.

"He's a kind soul, is Sanday, and sound — oh, enormously sound. All his vital juices, if he has any, drain off into scientific and professional channels. He couldn't tell a woman from a tripod, if you presented them to him offhand. Do you know, when Dr. Jane Joyce came into the lab. for the first time, he thought she was the new lab. boy, and shoved a lot of crocks at her to wash. She put them down in a high old rage and was flouncing off when he caught sight of her petticoats. What does the old dear do but conclude she's a medical masquerade! He hustles her out of the lab. with much withering sarcasm about female graces, and comes back rubbing his skinny hands. 'I'm very short-sighted, gentlemen,' he croaked, 'but not so short-sighted as that.' Joynes says the old girl reported Sanday for obscene and indecent conduct and that he had to crawl on his stomach to put things right, but Joynes is a bit of a liar. Last week I found the old fellow fumbling with his key at the door of the lab. 'Is that you, Hearne?' says he, stuttering and blinking round at me. 'I can't find the key-hole at all.' Oho, thinks I, the old Adam's kicking at last: we'll make a man of him yet. He's as drunk as a Duke. But he was n't, you know. He was just dazed for want of sleep: he'd been working day and night for seven days, without a break except for an odd meal or two. 'I'm unusually tired, Hearne,' he says, 'what would you advise?' I told him to try a music hall, and I'm damned if the fool did n't go straight off to the Oxford for three solid hours before he went to bed. He said next day he had n't been inside a place of amusement for ten years, and had 'quite for-

gotten the extraordinary art and precision required in sitting with another man's knees in the small of your back, a feather tickling your nose, and a hatpin presented at either ear."

I had made one or two attempts at interruption, like a feather beating against a head wind. I flung myself upon him and laid him gently on the ground. He fended me off, gurgling helplessly in his throat.

"Oh, I'm weak," he gasped. "Don't! You'll break me, you will."

"All these — selections," I said, "are so much shuffling from the point. You've got to pull up. Things are come to a pretty fine pass when the lethargic Sanday rouses himself to warn you."

"Sanday's love for me makes him over-anxious," he answered. "But what do you suppose it is that makes me yearn after a treatise on old red sandstone when I ought to be in the Physics lab., or keeps me rooted in the lab. when I ought to be swinking at something else? These science courses are all wrong. They leave no margin for original work. They might have been devised for the especial murder of genius. That's what it is, Joy. It's genius — the unpruned roots of genius annoying the tidy, academic mind."

"Well, the sooner you get to work with a pruning knife, the better for you," I retorted, and left him to his rusk and a monstrous version of the Mahabharata. He was studying it for the local color, with the intention of dumbfounding Aldabeezar III.

During his second year the moods of depression and idleness became more frequent. We were at our wit's end to get him to work at all. Then Margaret came, and for a few weeks we thought that she was succeeding where we had failed. He took her about London, for, like him, she could not work except in long sleepless stretches, with days and weeks of idleness between. He was eager and full of the old ambitions. But the impulse died out, and he relapsed into a moody uncertainty.

It would be easy to present Michael as a tragic figure, wrestling with the crushing problems of human existence. He seemed to have in him an instinctive revolt against the environment in which he found himself. He would abuse it at one and the same time as a fatuous and commonplace routine, and as a chaos of

blood and misery, too cruel and unjust to be endured. From his spasms of depressed silence he emerged into a windy dissatisfaction with the universe. He sprawled in the armchair and talked with a mocking humor that glanced edgewise at himself, or he pranced about the room, arguing, Oliver said, like a drunken Rationalist.

"The Christian religion is the biggest and most successful bluff in human history. But it loses its potency. Folk are beginning to see through it to the horrid, bloody tribal rites behind. The sacrifice of one for many — a heathen scattering of human blood. And, yet, if you take away the Cross from Christianity, what is there to distinguish it from — say — the teaching of Confucius? Except a sentimentality that makes it acceptable to the timorous and self-seeking. Of course, I know it's usual to get lyrical about the parables. But you can make the Gospels justify anything, from child labor to putting sand in the sugar."

"You shouldn't judge Christianity by bishops and amateur theologians," I put in.

"If Christianity is n't to be judged by Christians," he shouted, "what on earth is it to be judged by? A faith must be judged by the company it keeps. There is no faith, apart from its expression in human minds and human modes of life. And you know the company kept by this Cross business. It gets hold of the savage in us. It calls up fears and superstitions we would n't dare drag into the light of day. Perhaps religion is sacrifice, after all — a continuous sacrifice of will and personality."

Another night, he sat smoking in his chair until the small hours of the morning. Margaret and I had worked late, and we were gathering up our books and papers when he began to talk.

"Devils for work, you two," he said. "I suppose you think I ought to have been working alongside you! Sometimes I think I'll throw the whole thing up and go. It gets on me — this town — and other things. Things look secure to you. They do to me. I look round and I see a continuous procession of solid, satisfied citizens going up to town to buy cheap and sell dear, coming back to sleep with solid wives in solid beds. Sometimes I want to shout and chatter at them. Was n't there some one

who ran through the streets of Lichfield crying—'Woe, woe, to this bloody town?' I'd like to take and shove their noses in it, show 'em that they're standing in blood, drinking it, giving it to their children—blood pouring from a million exhausted bodies."

The stem of his pipe snapped suddenly in his hand. He looked absently at the pieces.

"The beastliness and the injustice of it crush me," he said. "Why is it *they* are n't crushed and shamed?"

"They don't see it," I said vaguely.

He jabbed at the table with the broken pipe.

"People have interests in life," he said. "They trade and groce and cheat and play golf. They march through life towards a fixed star. There is disorder and suffering—a universal lazarus-house. What purpose does it all serve? Suppose it does n't serve any purpose, or serves a bad one? I've tried to fill my mind with other things, but they all fail me. I keep falling through the bottom of my self-deceptions. I've run round blowing out little social bladders—thinking what could be done, what sort of tricks one could play to dodge the universe and bluff it into producing a decent life for men. But all this social stuff—is n't it, after all, as if one were fussing round about the drainage when the whole house is threatened with destruction? What's the use of it all if the world does n't mean anything anyway, or if it's fixed towards evil and injustice? One works and works and thinks and plans and at the end of it all there we are still, perhaps a little better clothed, a little better fed, a little healthier, but still clinging like insects to the face of the earth, menaced by catastrophes over which we have no control."

I clutched at my wits and tried to divert the torrent.

"There's plenty of meaning in life," I said, "if you'd give up trying to measure yourself by the planetary system. There's art—"

"Art can't be the meaning of things, you color-drunk fat-head. If it were, every one would have at least some sense of it. I have none. And I can't rid myself of the notion of an artist as the subtlest of liars, forcing a false simplification on to the complexity of life, crying 'order' where there is n't order. Don't

you, honestly, think that art is only another of the self-deceptions? It is brave and beautiful, but only bluff after all. No one but an artist would be crazed enough to suggest that empires rise and perish and the generations travail for the sake of producing a canvas or marble idol. Did Greece exist to produce Phidias? "

"You could argue that it did," I interrupted.

"You'd argue anything," he shouted. "But if you argued that, you'd be talking, let me tell you, like a fool or an artist. I never could make up my mind whether priests or painters were the more colossal egoists."

His eyes fell on the broken pipe.

"Well, I'm damned!" he said. "You've trodden on my pipe, one of you. You — you murderers . . ."

In my thoughts I seem to miss the source of Mick's unrest. Queerly it eludes me. As a child he suffered acutely from the hardships that I endured in silence and Oliver did not even see. There seemed a deep-drawn, hidden discord between some part of his consciousness and life. I do not know, indeed, whether life was the antagonist, or life malformed and twisted and made hideous by greed and apathy.

It would be easy, I say, to present him as a tragic rebel against the God of this world. Easy and intriguing and — untrue. There was nothing tragic about him. There was something twisted and something devilishly clear-sighted that kept him from drugging his brain with the deceptions and excuses that most of us offer ourselves for the sorry spectacle of dead and maimed along the wayside of progress. And between the two, he had moments when he came near a headlong renunciation of every plan and ambition that seemed to hold him in a decent and self-seeking world.

He had a passion for order and he found himself in a world where disorder is the rule of the road. He loved beauty with a sharp and subtle love, and he could only snatch it hardily from the ugly rush of a man-made struggle for existence.

Certainly he was not tragic, unless there is such a thing as a tragic sprite, bitter and joyous, mocking and cheerful, by turns or all at once, full of mental whimsies and freakish as Puck.

No. Freakish is wrong. He was not really freakish. There was too deep a purpose in him for that.

There were weeks when he overflowed with an exuberant happiness that swept us in and out of adventure. He got himself invited to a house in Dulwich, and there posed as a distinguished scientist. He came home at night and described how he had enthralled a drawing-room-full of people with the incredible wonders of science. I have no doubt of their incredibility in Mick's mouth.

In the course of a speech at the Debating Society he invented a Czech philosopher, whom he called Sinciwinics and endowed with views of astounding audacity on marriage and the nature of the Trinity. A doctor of theology sputtered and foamed at the mouth in refutation of what he said was barbarous and degraded Gnosticism, and the librarian was besieged next day for possible translations of the engaging heretic.

Mick's garrulity overflowed into parks and meeting-places of the damned. His enormous stick and queer cracked laugh became familiar as its bed to the bowler-hatted humanity that gathered in Brockwell Park on Sunday afternoons and listened while he bemused it with the most preposterous of social sciences.

He wasted so much time and had to make up for it by such devastating onslaughts upon arrears of work that we did not see how even his amazing vitality could stand the strain.

We were afraid to worry him about it lest he should get out of hand altogether, refuse to take a degree, disappear. There was about Mick none of that parsimonious decency that keeps most of us well on this side of our follies. We play the fool with the sure inward knowledge that we are bitted citizens and family men with regular habits and bellies to be filled. But one could not be sure of Mick.

He began to make mysterious excursions to the west end of London. Three or four times a week he left King's at dinner-time and came home near midnight. I sat up for him one night when he was later than usual. He came in about two, and dropped rather wearily into a chair. I waited for him to speak but he said nothing.

"It's no business of mine," I began carefully, "but I guess you've forgotten that your Final comes off in two months. You're wasting a hell of a lot of time, you know."

He laughed at me.

"I know what I'm doing," he said. "I can take the Finals on my head. Don't you worry yourself."

I pushed my books into a corner of the shelf and prepared to leave him in his conceit.

"Don't go, Joy," he said abruptly. "Sit down, and I'll tell you where I've been. She lives in South Kensington, and I spoke to her at the Queen's Hall. She's all right. I've met her family and all that."

I stared at him.

"You always were a fool," I said, "but I didn't think you were fool enough to ruin your chances of a First for the sake of holding hands with a girl you picked up at a concert."

"Shows how little you know me," he said cheerfully. "To tell you the truth, I'm not keen on letting it run on much longer, but one must — keep this off." He waved his hand at the hidden street.

After that night I noticed that his visits to South Kensington were always followed by a mood of weary excitement when he would walk about the room, debating with the universe.

"I've thought," he said once, "that science might be the meaning of the world. It might be worth living just for the sake of knowledge and mastery. But back I come again — knowledge for what? For comfort? If I knew all there were to know of nature's secret I'd still be unsatisfied."

It wanted a month to his Finals when he asked Margaret to go with him to South Kensington.

"You can come too, Joy," he said. "I'd like them to see that I have a presentable relative."

The girl lived, we found, in one of those faded yellow squares that cling round the skirts of fashionable London. A half-fed and startled-looking maid opened the door to us. Mick walked unannounced into a room on the right of the hall. We hesitated in the doorway. A woman, lounging in a cane chair, jumped up with premeditated vivacity.

"Oh, Mickie," she said, "and you've brought your friends. How sweet of you! Olive is upstairs. She won't be long."

Mick waved a hand at us. "Margaret. My brother. Mrs. Champion."

Mrs. Champion smiled archly, with one eyebrow lifted over Mick's unceremonious methods.

"How good of you," she said. "How too good of you."

She seemed to grope in her mind for words to express our transcendent goodness. The door opened, and a girl came into the room. She stood a moment poised against the black curtain in the doorway, and looked at us with a half-sullen defiance struggling with her smile. Her first words were ungracious.

"So you've brought them," she said to Mick, with a sidelong glance at me. "I did n't think you would."

"We are glad to come," Margaret said unexpectedly. "Mick has often spoken of you."

She took a step towards the girl, whose face brightened.

"And I'm so glad you're here," she answered. "I wanted to see you."

I found myself sitting beside Mrs. Champion in a horrible lanky chair. In the pauses of fending off her conversational rushes, I gave a furtive attention to her daughter.

Olive Champion had a curious exotic beauty of ivory skin and full red mouth. I thought there might be Jewish blood in her. Then I thought that she was really a Beardsley woman, but plump and youthful, with a quick feline vitality. She watched Mick with a defiant possessive air, as if she knew how little and yet how fiercely she held him. I did not like her and I was sorry for her.

We had tea on a series of small tables that pulled out from under each other, and stood perilously round on creaking spindle legs. It struck me quite suddenly that Margaret was a surprise to them. They had not expected her to be — well, Margaret — very graceful and slender in her long gray coat. Mrs. Champion affected a constrained and unnatural ease of manner and talked brightly on innumerable subjects. She poked little informative remarks at us. The father was in the city: I suppose he played a part in one of the many shady byways of modern finance. He

must have done it quite well, for the house was full of thick low couches, horrible satin cushions and gold-threaded curtains. Black bowls stood about the room, with scarlet poppies floating on the water. The tea-cups were scarlet, with black saucers and black plates, and small red-handled implements like ineffectual palette knives. Olive wore a red frock, very narrow in the body and full below the hips, and her mother had wriggled into a black gown that thinned off over shoulders and back. She had a white, solid back.

I could not place them. Neither mother nor daughter appeared to have any work or interest in life. They obviously spent a good deal of care on their bodies, and Mrs. Champion had dabbled in Women's Suffrage and Cubism and Christian Science without, however, ruffling her mental placidity in the slightest.

"There's something in healing by faith, isn't there?" she appealed to me.

"Oh, yes," I said helpfully, "there must be."

"That's what I feel," she said. "Soul calling to soul, you know, with healing in their wings." I saw that Mick was restraining himself and I drew her gently from the subject.

Olive said little. She seemed to be constantly on the verge of snubbing her mother quite conclusively. She sat with compressed lips and half-closed eyes. Margaret made some tentative remark about "The New Machiavelli." Wells was our conversational standby.

Olive looked up.

"Oh," she said, "did you like that? I thought it rather silly. The idea is all right, I suppose, but it's mixed up with such a lot of rubbish. That about love being spoilt by secrecy. It's nonsense, isn't it? And all the political stuff bored me. It's out of date, too, isn't it?"

"Olive's a bit of an anarchist," Mick interrupted. "She thinks Wells is a fussy old bird."

Mrs. Champion burst upon the conversation with a bewildering excursion into politics. As I listened I found myself unconsciously trying to understand the household. I had never met people like the Champions before, and their aimless attitude puzzled me. They did not seem to touch reality at any point. They

squatted among their dreadful cushions like mislaid wives of some uxorious monarch. They had not, so far as I could see, the remotest notion of any life outside a routine of shops, cafés, and theaters.

Of course, they were not the oddities they seemed to me at that time. I came later upon similar households everywhere in London, curious by-products of the social chaos. They lived on money made by anti-social charlatanry, and copied their manner of life from households where charlatanry had been raised to the dignity of high finance. Nothing had any grip upon them. Half a century ago they would have carefully observed all the forms of religion and social convention, and arranged their lives by a well-regulated tradition. But formal religion has exhausted itself, the old class landmarks have disappeared, and the Champions and their kind, abandoned to their own sense of fitness, have disintegrated into a mob of half-educated, acquisitive women, spending their abundant leisure on little futile dashes at new sensations.

With the rigidity of convention these people seemed to have dropped some of the underlying decencies. There was, one gathered, a tacit understanding between mother and daughter that certain "boys" belonged to the mother and certain "men" to Olive, and a furtive conspiracy against the obtrusiveness of Mr. Champion.

He was not conventionally obtrusive. Her parents went to bed and left Olive sitting on Mick's knee with an unctuous trustfulness that made him feel like a hardened seducer.

They felt, I believe, that she must be allowed a free hand in her adventures after marriage. She was no fool, and could be trusted not to cheapen the market.

Mrs. Champion disappeared after tea, and Mick plunged into conversation. I imagined that he was diverting energy from some hidden source of passion to create the artificial passion of his words.

Olive listened to him with a half-scornful admiration. Now and then she would dispute his doctrines, more, I thought, for the sake of differing from him, than because she was really moved or interested.

"Every one knows," he cried, "why there is all this rushing

round and hushing up of sex, this nodding and winking and whispering over the heads of children. It's from fear: people keep the young shut up as long as they can, and then they push them out into the world and say, 'Thank goodness, they're off our hands, and if they come a cropper through ignorance or curiosity, it's none of our business.' They're jealous too: they hate to think of their sons and daughters knowing as much about life as they themselves do, and so they try to keep them innocent, and teach them that love is all a matter of holding hands among the daisies."

Olive glanced at him with a curious, sleepy pleasure. Her cheeks were flushed, and she sat with her hands open, palms upward in her lap.

"The old ethics don't grip people now," Mick added, "and that doubles the confusion. There's only the jar and pull of fear and jealousy. The old are jealous of the young, and afraid of what they'll do. They can't help themselves: it's an instinct, just as old animals are jealous of their young. One sex is jealous of the other's power. Class is jealous and fearful of class, nation of nation . . ."

We escaped from Mick's insatiable lust for moral scalps, and found ourselves talking of artists and cafés. Olive displayed an unexpected animation.

"I know a painting man," she said. "He is a wonderful creature. I went with him once to a night club where there was dancing and singing." She turned to Mick. "There's the free life for you. No stupid conventions about that. In art there are no conventions," she echoed vaguely.

"Conventions! Art! Night Clubs!" Mick spluttered. "What the devil do you think all those posturers have to do with art? Getting excited in cafés, seducing models, working themselves up into a state of silly, dirty-minded passion in which they conceive their rotten pictures! Most art is nothing but premeditated lechery."

There were tears in Olive's eyes.

"You need n't make fun of me like that," she said.

Mick seated himself on the arm of her chair.

"Never mind, sweetheart," he said, "I don't mean more than half I say."

He stooped and kissed her hair. She shut her eyes and pressed her body against his. I glanced at Margaret in time to see the flickering contempt that twisted her mouth.

"She's an incurable romantic, my little Olive," Mick said tenderly, "and she'll never see that romance is only the refuge of the cowards and the second-rate."

"Oh-oh," said Olive. "What about Shakespeare and the Tempest?"

"Could n't be a more disgustingly realistic play," Mick told her. "Think of Miranda's gloating over the young man, and her father's plans for making her irresistible and keeping her from spoiling her chance of a respectable marriage bed. No romance about that, my girl."

When we took our leave, Mick and Olive lingered behind. Margaret and I hesitated in the passage, wondering what had become of Mrs. Champion. We heard Mick say unsteadily, "Kiss me, Olive."

A moment later they came out together, the girl clinging to his arm. She made no attempt to hide the urgency of her desire: her eyes shone with an exultant ecstasy, and her hand moved caressingly down the lines of his body.

We did not talk much on the way home. Not until we were half way up Herne Hill did Mick say, "Well, what do you think of Olive?"

"She's amazingly pretty," I answered.

"I'll admit that she attracts me very strongly," he said. "Of course, her family are awful. The mother is a — well, I believe, a downright bad lot, and her father an etiolated little Jew. One would n't want to marry into a family like that. Olive's much finer than her family."

"She seems to have read quite a lot," Margaret ventured.

"She has, and she likes you to know it," Olive's lover said. "She'd like to pose as having an original intellect. She did n't say much to you, but she's always talking to me of the books she has read and the extraordinary people she has met. It does n't

take me in. I know perfectly well she's got the brains of a well-read parrot."

I don't know how the girl came to have the hold on Mick that she undoubtedly had. I suppose her tremendous physical vitality offered an easy refuge from the unrest that grew in him as his work at King's drew near completion. She was wonderfully beautiful. I believe that his dislike of her was at least as great as his love. Her unrestrained passion drew him fiercely and repelled him as fiercely. There were times when he seemed curiously afraid of her and her need to absorb him. "She wants keeping in her place," he said, "and I'm the man to do it." But he had doubts of his own strength of purpose and he did not relish the prospect of a lifetime spent in keeping her off.

Once, when he and I were working alone, he said, "Margaret did n't like Olive, did she?"

"She's hardly Margaret's sort," I answered cautiously.

"No." He considered a minute. "Margaret can live with you without always trying to get at you. That girl would suck me dry — mind and soul — dry as an old glove if I gave her half a chance. I'd never be able to do anything. I sha'n't give her the chance. I don't intend to marry her. She'd make a rotten mother, would n't she? That means quite a lot to me, you know."

After a while he added abruptly, "I suppose you all think she's my mistress. Well, you're quite wrong. I'm not going to give her any such hold upon me. There's not the least likelihood of my making that particular fool of myself."

A week later he went to South Kensington after promising to come home early. He did not come. Margaret and I sat up for him until midnight, and then Margaret went to bed. He came about three, and stood in the doorway, regarding me with a triumphant defiance. I did not need to be told that he had made that particular fool of himself after all.

CHAPTER XVII

BRIXTON is the queerest suburb of London. In some sense it stands for all the rotten shams of the society that has sprung from the wreckage of the feudal system. It stands for cheap, showy rubbish as against honorable craftsmanship, for senseless waste, and for pinching squalor overlaid by a horrible, electric-lit superfluity of imitation silk blouses, brown paper patent shoes, gilt watches and dyed cat-skin. You may stand with bulging eyes and reeling brain before the blue glare of a plate-glass wilderness, and then walk away round the corner into a narrow street a-swarm with human maggots and foetid with the smells of rotten fruit and snippets of bad meat.

Walk further towards the river through the exhausted, colorless streets of Kennington, the sleeping-places of human beings whose days are a frenzied scrambling on the insane slippery pyramid of a Beer and Buns civilization.

Walk the other way into the meretricious neatness of Herne Hill where the small fry of the professional classes perch dangerously over the abyss, clinging to their salaried respectability, their brick and stucco, and the cuffed and collared decency of their wasted, useless lives.

In these catacombs of murdered humanity the industrial system spreads itself out for you, a monstrous futile circle of greed, over-production and poverty, achieving for the race nothing, but everything for the stuffing and adorning of a few men and women without pride of ancestry or thought for posterity. An organized futility, defended by jack-priests, politicians, and a spreading, scabrous belief that black coats, gramophones and brick villas descend with the other middle-class decencies straight from God through the capitalist.

We walked into Brixton one night a week for several weeks to the flat shared by Mick's school teachers. They were a T.P.'s Circle. If you do not know what that is you are ignorant indeed, and unfitted to converse on the uplifting of the masses. We went

because Mick said it was our duty to go, and moreover, the two girls had done him kindnesses.

Every Friday evening a round dozen members, mostly very young, met at the flat for social and intellectual high-jinks. There were agile, high-collared young men subject to sudden attacks of humor, and two or three young women, very bright and vivacious in white blouses and assorted skirts. Camp coffee and flat lemonade excited the company to unrestrained outbursts of wit and gaiety. The young women laughed, wiped their eyes, said their hair was coming down, and Mr. Cole was too funny or too awfully clever for words. Sometimes papers were read on the philosophy of Bernard Shaw, or the Georgian poets, or anything else on the intellectual plane of the circle, and earnest discussions followed, lasting until one of the young men broke away and had a particularly virulent attack.

The really amazing thing about these papers was their intelligence. Their writers were not to be hustled into admiration: they were quite unexcited about Mr. Shaw and very tolerant towards *vers libre*.

"Idees," said Mr. Cole, "idees are all very well. This Shaw now, what you might call pro-lif-ic in his head. Pro-lif-ic. If you girls don't know what that means, I'm not going to tell you: go and look it up if you think it's a naughty word." He surveyed the hopeful smiles of the company. "What I say is give us something a man can get something out of. More meaty. None of your pre-digested breakfast idees. Or else something a man can look at. Legs and dresses — not too much of the dress. These idees now. What I mean is — they give you an idee, like giving a dog bones. You worry at them: nothing to get off them though. They're just idees — bones. Some folk like chewing bones, maybe." He stopped, tried to get back to his argument, and tangled himself up in a hopeless attempt to express his sense of the futility of the intellectual drama.

Michael came to the rescue, and Mr. Cole collapsed into his chair, rather hurt and worried. Afterwards I saw him talking earnestly to Margaret, who listened with an appearance of sympathetic interest that soothed him.

I should not forget Charlotte. Charlotte was the middle-aged

daughter of a music hall artiste whose wife and family avenged themselves upon him by a searing respectability. She had traveled: she looked down upon the gambollings of the younger members with contemptuous impatience and turned to us for spiritual refreshment. I am afraid that she did not get it. From the heights of our own peacock-arrogance we laughed at her eager superiority and her fierce determination to be all mind. She wrote extraordinary plays which mixed up the Theban and Arthurian cycles in a finely impartial spirit. She went to live in a garret and tried to persuade Oliver to share it. We were lent the manuscript of her plays and could not decide whether to tell her honestly how bad and impossible they were, or attempt the hopeless task of editing them. The scene of one was laid in "A place of light and silence," and the characters were all embodied aspects of a debauched Theosophy. We were consistently kind and respectful to her. I am ashamed to remember our inhuman kindness. Poor, pitiful, lonely Charlotte, keeping alight her absurd enthusiasms with a courage that defied middle-age, neglect and endless disappointment. I do not, even now, see what place there could be for her in any society, since the only society that would make Charlotte happy would be one that liked to listen in a semi-drunken ecstasy to Charlotte's plays. I don't know. Perhaps she would have been born and brought up more successfully in a wiser kind of State.

For a short time a young German was a member of the Circle. I do not know how he got into it, nor what he must have thought of it. He did really seem to be in a perpetual state of amazement at its cheerful fatuity. We were a peculiar grief to him. He seemed to think that a University education must ensure a certain level of intelligence and approached us with the joyous intention of being heavily and mercilessly intellectual. When he could not satisfy his horrid lust for raw brain he became very angry. He told us how much bigger and better everything was in Berlin. Business houses, theaters, streets, parks—"much bigger," he said, "oh, much bigger and besser than here."

"Well, what about the docks?" Mick asked.

"Docks in Germany," said he, "are much bigger and besser than any docks in England."

"And our municipal parks?"

"In Berlin the parks are much bigger and besser than Hyde Park or any park."

"And our municipal asylum?"

"Oh, in Berlin," he began, "much bigger, oh much bigger——"

The guffaws of the agile young men interrupted him. He stopped, saw his blunder and jumped from his chair. The blood rushed into his face and neck and there were tears in his eyes.

"We show you," he stammered, "one day we show you."

He was angry, but he was also genuinely hurt that a trap should have been laid for him.

Oliver laid a hand upon his arm.

"You must n't mind Mick," he said, "the poor fellow can't help it."

The young German shook him off.

"I don' care," he said with a fierce dignity. "In Berlin we show more courteous than this." He took his hat and went, the honors of the field with him.

As soon as we were out of the house we fell upon Mick and abused him heartily.

"Playing off a thing like that on a stranger," Oliver said. "A schoolboy would be ashamed of it. Did you think you were proving your English superiority over the simple German?"

"It was pretty feeble," Mick admitted, "but he was insufferable, and he ought to have seen through it: any one else would have. Besides," he added sharply, "you're a nice crowd to talk of superiority. Don't you sit with your tongues in your cheeks every time we go there? I suppose you think they won't see you're making fun of them."

"Well, I'm not going there any more," I said. "I've got to work."

We did go once more, when Oliver read them a long, dull paper on J. M. Synge. We sat in the silence of the tomb. Even the lemonade could not rouse us, and the meeting broke up in gloom and depression. The intellect should be judged by its fruits: we labored and brought forth a dull dog!

Perhaps because Mick's accusation pricked me, I thought about that T.P.'s Circle long after we had left it. I did not at the time think so much of the queer pathos of that handful of clerks and shop-assistants reading papers to each other in a shamefaced sort of way, struggling with awkward, unused faculties to understand things, to get to know things that had nothing to do with ledgers and tape-measures.

"Pootry," Mr. Cole said wistfully to Margaret. "I suppose you know a lot of pootry now? I mean this Keats. Would he be as good a pote as Browning, f'r instance?"

His face brightened when Margaret said she thought him as good or better.

"Why," he said, "I can understand about Keats. I could n't seem to get away with the other one. Real sad he died like that, was n't it? Gave me quite a shock when I read about it."

We had not laughed at them, but I suppose we could not avoid a half-conscious contempt, because, forsooth, they had n't had our chances.

Of course, they wanted to have a good time. But it seemed to me that there was more in it than that, and more than the craving for knowledge and beauty so soon to be choked out of them. All but Charlotte were very young: they would n't have been there otherwise. As they grew old or were married, they dropped slowly out of the Circle and were lost in the dull complexities of a responsible life. And you must remember that our particular Circle was only one of thousands, bearing many names but groping towards the same thing.

They were so many blind feelers, reaching out to an ideal of social consciousness that is almost as far from realization to-day as it was when the first savages crept together for warmth and safety. Along the road begun then the human race still creeps, fumbling towards the stars.

Man has vast, undeveloped powers of inter-communion for which no adequate expression has been devised, for which no adequate expression can be devised in a world torn by fear and jealousy and organized for the satisfaction of greed.

I am convinced that the task for the race is to find some means whereby all these powerful feelings for social unity and against

egoism and wolfish lusts shall be turned into channels of human usefulness.

The mystic yearns to merge his identity in a union with the Absolute-and-all-that-sort-of-thing. The lover turns all his unrealized altruism into the rushing tide of his sexual desire. The former achieves in the last resort an annihilation of personality in an experience beyond sense-experience. The latter achieves matrimony and children: his altruism narrows and hardens into a family-egoism hardly to be distinguished in its nature from the egoism of the mere bachelor.

We are all mystics and lovers at one time or another; we have, in more or less conscious degree, the instinct towards union with the beyond-self. And the world is so arranged that these very instincts that should have gone to the making of a perfect State, are a handicap in the competitive struggle and must be turned into the comparatively harmless channels of religious or family egoism.

Mysticism: the consummation of human egoism. Family love: egoism which sees itself reflected in a series of mirrors, wife, children, household goods.

That unborn State, the fine, spacious State for which men lie dead in the mud of Flanders, is perishing in the womb for want of these thwarted and diverted social instincts.

Suppose there were tiny holes in the barriers that hold these great forces in check, would not the waters trickle out into just such little pools of T.P.'s Circles, and Societies to Enforce Peace, and art and poetry circles, and all the rest of the futile ways through which men try to express their sub-conscious longing for a social unity founded on brotherly respect and understanding?

We stumbled into artistic circles with the same uneasy sense of being out of place that we had had in the cheerful flat in Brixton. I do not remember how we came to meet young Stavrillov. I do not, indeed, remember anything of him before the afternoon that Margaret and I had tea in his studio. He was eager to show his pictures. They were rather wonderful. There was a Magician's City, with white domes and minarets hung in the clear, deep blue of a night sky, and white walls that showed slowly as tall cowed figures, watching with hidden eyes.

"I paint," Stavrillov said, "not men or things, but states of mind. This is the wizard in man, buried deep in his consciousness, but watching, always watching to seize him unawares and cast him into the abyss."

"Abyss?" Margaret queried.

"Where there is no faith and no God, but only a hopeless struggle with the secret of the universe."

We had the dimmest idea of his meaning, but we admired his work, and preferred his states of mind to those of the Man Posting a Letter, whose features we had seen at the Exhibition, scattered all over the canvas in an agony of disintegration. Our open admiration pleased him and he took us into various studios. We found ourselves invited to Chelsea teas and small private exhibitions. Once we attended a lecture on scenic art. The lecturer had made models of his stage settings and as we sat frowning over their black and purple symbolism, an eager old lady tapped Margaret on the shoulder.

"I beg your pardon, my dear," she said, "but I can't quite catch everything he says, though I can see the beautiful models. I suppose that is the bathroom he is showing now?"

It was a Hamlet setting, I think. Or it might have been Macbeth. I do not myself think that Shakespeare would have cared for the new stage settings. Poor wretch, he had the defects of his age.

We progressed into the region of drawing-room art and stood perilously about on polished floors and priceless rugs, fragile china in our hands and fear in our hearts, listening to the endless talk. These people did not exactly read themselves papers, but their mentality differed not at all in kind and very little in degree from mentality of our T.P.'s Circle. There was the same vague circling argument, the same pawing over of scraps of knowledge, but it was all mixed up with vanities and jealousies that did not appear among their Brixton kinsfolk. And there was — unmistakably — the same fumbling desire for completer understanding. More sharply, because through more finely developed senses, these people felt the need of a synthesis of social elements that now are discordant and jarring. It did not, of course, prevent their quarreling and hating each other quite violently.

We met Barlow in one of the drawing-rooms. He was a dark, intense young man, with a fluttering scorn of the rugs and the fragile china. He said they reeked of the Royal Academy. Later we discovered him to be a handy-man of the arts. He painted pots and lampshades, designed jewelry, dresses, cushions and curtains, all in what he called virile colors. He had, indeed, an unappeasable appetite for virility. He yearned after it: when he had drawn a red-headed woman with narrow, pallid face, red slit mouth, and dark slit eyes, and sheathed her in red and purple and gold, he became enraptured of his male dignity and drew her again on the same sheet of paper without the sheath. He had a collection of these double designs. Mick called them the *Seventy Skinny Sins*.

Barlow's wife, a plump, brown-skinned woman, watched over him with jealous adoration. She made frocks after his Bakst-like designs and wore them with a scared defiance. I believe she had a secret longing for gracious lines, but she sacrificed it with her other pale ideas on the altar of Barlow's extraordinary egotism. Once in our hearing she roused herself to a shy defense of the Roman Church. He cut her short in the harshest manner, and drew her fiercely aside.

"I hope you'll never talk like that again," he said. "It upsets my balance, and it is most important that I should not be upset. My art . . . balance . . . my art." The expostulatory voice followed me through the crowded room, interrupted by the eager murmuring of his wife.

Afterwards she made fluttering excuses.

"He's not angry when he talks like that," she said, "it's his way. He's so high-strung. I feel so stupid beside him. All that I am he has made me, and I know that I don't fully understand him. His spirit is too great for him. He works so hard, oh, so splendidly hard."

He did work hard. He swept up fragments from every artistic table and shamelessly fathered the ideas of other men. He also wrote verse in what he swore to be the manner of Verlaine — sewer-stuff, Mick called it. In some strange fashion, he regarded art as a kind of home-made aphrodisiac.

As the Finals drew nearer we gave up our outside interests. We

had not seen Stavrillov for weeks when he descended upon us at King's and dragged us to the private exhibition of a popular young artist. The boards were as polished and the rugs as priceless as ever. The long narrow room was crowded. Margaret crossed over to a group of young women whose necks cannot possibly have been so long as they looked. I found myself with some artists who were abusing the pictures violently under cover of the loud talk. When I met Margaret again, she was listening to Barlow's wife. I caught a fragment of their talk.

"My dear," the little woman said, "the agony of his face. It was terrible. I said to myself — never again. I can't bear him to go through such suffering for me."

I got Margaret away.

"Who's been murdered?" I said. "Whose were the agonies?"

"Barlow's," Margaret answered. "She wanted me to recommend her a woman doctor because of the anguish in Barlow's eyes when Mrs. Barlow calls in a man to cure her ailments."

I laughed. Margaret regarded me dourly.

"She said she could n't bear to see Barlow talking to another woman and that he suffered dreadfully if she spoke to another man. They're unclean," she finished, with her mouth twisted in distaste, "positively unclean."

We looked round for the others. Oliver was sitting on the edge of a table, very red and angry, thrusting some artistic dogma at a group of excited men. Barlow was one of them.

"You will tell us next," he said, waving a thin hand in Oliver's face, "that we don't know what we're saying. We — artists — know nothing of art."

"No more you do," my brother retorted. "Artists! Are *you* an artist? Daubing pots is n't art."

I was about to interfere when Mick appeared suddenly. He took Oliver's arm and pulled him off the table.

"You must n't mind him," he said sweetly, "he was dragged up in the gutter. Along with me," he added as an after-thought.

He led Oliver through the astonished young men, and we took our leave.

We never saw our good friend Stavrillov again, nor heard of

him until I read he had died for France. Peace be with you, Stavrillov of the subtle brush. Sleep untroubled, restless mind, and hands obedient to the dreaming eyes.

We forgot Chelsea but we were not allowed to forget Brixton. It jerked up again in exalted company. Anthony had persuaded us to go with him to the Ethical Church. We sat through a lecture on Hamlet of which an undergraduate in his first year should have been ashamed, and blinked unhappily at a series of scantily-clad youths chasing each other with torches round a large flat disc. A scroll, or a banner, or it may have been a pulpit, offered "Praise to the Human Heart by which we live." It seemed un-called-for. Christ and Buddha looked forlornly round their alien temple upon furred women and frock-coated men. There was a thick fog outside when we left, but it was nothing to the fog inside.

We climbed to the top of a 'bus that was trying to find Victoria Station. Mick leaned over the front.

"Driver," he shouted, "drive like hell to Charing Cross." The 'bus started with a jerk, and the next minute ran into a lamp-post. After the crash of broken glass and the shrieks of women passengers, the driver's voice could be heard, laying direct responsibility for the accident upon Mick.

We went two or three times to the highbrow tabernacle, but never acquired the taste for potted knowledge. The people were much heavier in the hand than our friends in Chelsea, more tolerant and less witty, broader-minded and less generous, and infinitely farther from a spiritual renaissance. By the same token their mental state was nearer that of their Brixton prototypes, but immensely more sophisticated, and confused by notions of the intellectual life drawn from dull books and duller quarterlies.

They tried to *wangle* a communal harmony by proclaiming a common search for Truth. Truth, that has been sought and missed in travail of mind and spirit, does not come at the beck of easy folk. They ought to have known—they had the blood-stained testimony of the ages—that order is not conjured out of disorder, nor truth out of error by singing Swinburne instead of Wesley and absorbing indigestible slabs of cold, dead science and

literature. Some of them, no doubt, worked very hard, as your well-fed intellectual understands hard work, and produced a number of little truths which did not hang together. They had no power to make them hang together. They did not, in fact, achieve a synthesis, but only an attitude . . .

A wind from the moors clears my brain of these phantoms. In a few minutes my good landlady will come to shut the window and draw the curtains. Then she will bring in the lamp and light it fussily. It is one of her little ways of pretending that I am not blind. I should not, after all, like to think that I was sitting in a dark room.

She will set the table for tea and draw it up to the fire, and tell me that the hyacinths are coming out in the big green bowl. I have a fairly good idea of this room of mine, though I have not seen it. It is wider and more gracious than the little red-walled room at Herne Hill. The walls are gray, and the carpet is white and gray and black. Low book-shelves run round two sides of the room. They are filled with my own books. Stupid to have books one cannot read? Ah, but I can read some of them. I know my old *Morte d'Arthur* so well that I can trace my finger along any passage and read it to myself. And there are others: my school copy of *Palgrave's Golden Treasury* among them.

It is a pleasant room: the windows look across the valley to the moors. But do you suppose I think of moors and asphodel to-night? Not I.

The years shrivel and are blown like ashes in the wind. I sit in a knobby leather chair, listening to four eager voices. What are they talking about? Perhaps Wells. Probably "*The New Machiavelli*." We were always discussing "*The New Machiavelli*." For a long time we had no copy of our own, and then Margaret brought it back from Antwerp in two yellow Tauchnitz volumes. They passed from hand to hand in King's, pored over and annotated, until only the veriest fragment was left to return to their owner. Significantly enough, we went near ignoring the social ideals and philosophy to quarrel over the sex problem. Margaret, under the influence of a clever weekly, said that Rem-

ington and Isabel were weak slaves, and could have kept themselves out of their troubles if they had had foresight and will enough.

Mick would have none of it.

"Their love was the finest part of them," he cried. "It makes me angry to see Wells using the phrase 'two bad people.' They ought n't to have apologized for themselves: they should have justified themselves shamelessly and gloriously."

"Well, they could n't do that, even if they wanted to," Margaret told him, "unless they had posed. The whole weight of the tradition against them was bound to make itself felt in their minds now and then."

We never finished our arguments, for Mick broke away and rode violently over the discussion.

"This silly moral sanctity," he raved, "you know it's all rot. Bolstering up a lot of rotten herd-cowardice by pretending it's divinely ordained. Look at it from a broad biological standpoint. Try and get away from trousers and claw-hammer coats and ask yourself what life — life, I say — has to do with our environment of fenced-off gardens and rabbit-marriages. A mind in tune with the present order of things — a mind, I mean, that can view bishops and slums, and brothels and middle-class weddings with equanimity — may appear healthy and ordinary, but really it's rottenly diseased. It's a perfect hotbed of disease and filth ——"

"Oh, for pity's sake ——" Margaret protested. "Besides minds are bound to be influenced by their surroundings, even minds that are at strife with them. Remington was influenced, and so he could n't help feeling at times that he was wicked ——"

Oliver jerked himself noisily off the fender.

"So he was," he said heavily, "and the book is a wicked book — an immoral book."

"What d'you mean, an immoral book?" Mick shouted.

"I mean a book that ought n't to be in the hands of any one under twenty-five. A book that just reproduces the disorder and ugliness of life. A book should be beautiful and full of happy things. Is n't life beastly enough?"

"You mean baby hands and daisies and love among the ruins," Mick jeered.

"No, I don't," Oliver said stolidly. "Is that what you mean by beauty? I tell you it's immoral because it's ugly and because it has an evil influence on the adolescent mind. You can't deny it. Is n't Mick driven to rank lunacy and Joy to defending adultery?"

And though we joined in pouring scorn on his low-minded, Puritan æsthetics, we could not shake him in the least.

"Remington should have stuck to his wife. She's the finest character in the whole book. I'm not even taking into account the work he flung down. If he did n't think enough of that himself . . ."

Many nights we worked until twelve and then talked far into the morning. Oh, the great city of talk we made, with twisting by-ways and well-trodden streets, little houses set a-wry and filled with small peering things, and brave palaces where the citizens ruffled it i' the sun — a city of gables and thrusting towers that sank into white ashes at the dawn.

We read Lombroso and were astonished at the number of degenerates among our friends.

We discovered Strindberg, poring over his few supreme plays until the phantoms of his tortured mind peered at us from the shadows, and Oliver drove Margaret to a frenzy by finding in her all the traits of a vampire woman. Under Strindberg's influence we planned a monstrous, gloomy tragedy. There was a cold-blooded Scientist who was Mick and a Philosopher who was Oliver. Oliver saw himself in the rôle of serene, moralizing on-looker. There was another scientist, to whom we gave — I cannot think why — the appalling name of Ashton Pallisser. He was a good scientist but weak in the will, and to save him from himself the Scientist who was Mick persuaded a woman colleague to sacrifice herself in the hope of restoring balance to the Pallisser mind. The Philosopher, by his devilish insight, discovered all, and predicted the end, which was horrid. The woman, in a revulsion of feeling, shot the cold-blooded one and herself; Ashton Pallisser committed suicide, and the Philosopher was left to take the bodies out to be cremated. I have somewhere a fragment of the great ruin, in which the Philosopher "proceeds to argue the point," the Scientist "lays down his position," and Pal-

lister, "after some forced cheerfulness," goes out for the evening, probably with the worst intentions.

We were working at this outrage one evening when Margaret began to laugh.

"What's the matter?" I asked.

She leaned back helplessly.

"It's so damn funny," she said, and choked.

After a moment's indignant silence we saw how damn funny it was, and the fearsome thing perished in a burst of inextinguishable laughter.

We were not always talking or working in that Herne Hill room. Anthony played for us, and we sang for ourselves. We sang anything, from Indian Love Lyrics and the "Star of Eve" with its immoral use of semitones, to attempts at Palestrina. But our intimate songs, the songs we cherished, were worthless things that slept under hedges and hung about the streets.

"I want 'ter see the dear old home again,"

and

"Is London where it used to be?

Is the Strand still there?

Do the boys still stroll down the west . . ."

and the melancholy lilt of "Lindy," which we sang very inaccurately and punctuated with an Oxford sniff . . .

I have drawn back the curtains and unlatched the window. Above the sound of waters rushing and the restless fret of pines, a lusty voice comes singing from the other end of the years —

"It's the go-o-od ship Robert E. Lee

Has come to carry the cotton away."

CHAPTER XVIII

FINALS gathered speed and swept upon us. During the examination week we never saw Michael. He went straight from the hall to Olive, and came home long after midnight. In the morning he got up just in time to gulp his breakfast and rush away for the day's papers. Questions irritated him, and we did not know whether he was doing well or ill. The examination over, he hung about in London, dividing his time between South Kensington and the Natural History Museum. He made the excuse that Sanday had promised to give him his results before they were officially posted. The others went home, but I stayed in town with a vague idea of looking after him. He guessed this and laughed at me.

We were lounging in the common room at King's when Sanday came along the corridor and caught sight of us through the open door. He thrust his long neck through the opening. "Come up to Gower Street, and see me to-night," he said to Mick. "Er — you too, Hearne," he added, with a nod at me.

"That means news," Mick said, with a cracked excitement in his voice. "Let's go somewhere. We can't fool round here all day. Somewhere outside."

"Hampstead?" I ventured. "I've never been to Hampstead." "Nor ever will — with me," he said. "Is n't there a Garden City there? Who the hell wants to see a Garden City?"

We went to Richmond and lay drowsily in the tawny, brittle grass while the sun wheeled slowly through a colorless sky.

We had no money for lunch, but on our way back stopped in a pink and green café and ordered tea. I came out as parched as I went in, for Mick emptied the tea-pot, pressing his share of the bread and butter on me by way of compensation.

The streets gave off a terrible airless heat. We crawled along Oxford Street and through the cooler, dusty byways round the Museum.

Sanday was out when we reached his rooms, but the landlady knew Mick and showed us into his sitting-room on the first floor. Mick flung himself on to the couch and a cloud of dust flew out, settling slowly in the stifling heat. All the windows were shut. I opened one, but slammed it up again hurriedly as a breath of air came drifting in from Euston Road. We heard Sanday's high voice in the passage and a minute later he came into the room.

"Glad to see you," he said, "glad to see you. Sit down, sit down. I've been to Mudie's. I never go to Mudie's if I can help it, but I just happened to see a book I wanted. It's a dreadful place. Don't you think it's a dreadful place? Full, absolutely full of useless books. Who reads them? I don't know, I'm sure. Who writes them is a greater mystery still. People who write novels ought to have their brains sterilized before the horrid thing gets such a grip on them. A kind of mental castration, I mean. Don't you think so? Don't you think so?"

He fussed round the room, opened a window and shut it up again, lifted books from their shelves and laid them down about the room. Suddenly seating himself, he began to flutter the leaves of one of them with an aimless haste.

"Well, Hearne," he said, "well, what are you doing with yourself these days?"

"Just knocking round," Mick said. "I've worked a little in the Museum Reading Room."

"Oh have you?" Sanday interrupted. "Have you really? Now I could never work in that place. As soon as I get seated some one brings me a lot of books I never asked for. Or some female sits down in the next chair and empties a lot of letters and pencils and hairpins and things out of a little bag. She takes her hat off, and runs a hatpin through her hair, and I think she's transfixed herself. Then she jabs me with her elbow and goes off into apologies. She rustles about with her books and fidgets in her chair and scratches away with a little pen until I am quite feverish with apprehension. Then off she goes and comes back with another worse than herself, and they kiss and whisper away. I said once—'Madam, you would be doing me an inestimable favor if you could conduct your conversation with

fewer sibilants.' They both bristled and glared at me, turned their back and talked for an hour. I can't stand it, you know. I have to come away. It's sheer waste of time for me to go to that place."

"You might have an appliance to go across your head and fit over both ears," Mick suggested gravely.

Sanday looked up with quick interest. "Yes, I might," he said. "Of course I might. I must think about that."

He began to talk at a great rate about the experiments he was conducting in the deserted laboratory at King's, and broke off suddenly to say—"But then, you know, I should still see her mouth moving, and I really think that would be worse."

Mick's lips framed the word "blinkers." I made a hurried remark about the heat. Sanday rolled a glazed eye at me and turned to Mick.

"I'm sure you want to hear about the examination," he said, and fell abruptly into long silence. Mick smoked on with an imperturbable gravity. Sanday sighed, and seemed to rouse himself with an effort.

"You've done well," he said. "You've done as well as I expected you to do."

We waited again. "I don't know what your expectations were, sir," my brother ventured.

Sanday sat bolt upright. "My expectations?" he said. "I expected you to distinguish yourself, young man, and so you have, so you have."

A flush crept slowly up Mick's face. He examined his pipe carefully. "I'm glad of that," he said at last.

"Of course," Sanday added, "some things might have been improved on. But on the whole a creditable performance. A remarkably creditable performance. I congratulate you, Hearne."

"Thanks, sir."

"And now you may look forward to Cambridge for a year or a couple of years, until we see how you shape at original research, and then we'll see again. If you stick to your work and show the proper amount of development, you need have no fear for your future. I can say that without hesitation."

There was a long silence. I stared out of the window. The

houses hung in the motionless air. A girl came out of the swing doors of a café and moved slowly away, a streak of color across my sight. Two taxi-drivers, leaning against their cabs, sawed monotonously with their arms in an interminable argument. I glanced across the room. Mick was still smoking silently, his eyes fixed on the empty fireplace and his arms crossed on his chest. Sanday appeared sunk in dejection on the edge of the couch. I realized with a shock that he was really watching Mick quite sharply with eyes that had become bright and hard beneath their colorless lashes.

Mick may have been half-aware of the unseen scrutiny. He shifted uneasily in his chair, and spoke at last with a hint of reluctance.

"I'm really very grateful for the interest you have taken in me, sir."

"So you ought. Not at all," Sanday snapped.

The words came quickly now. "I'm grateful for this Cambridge offer. Immensely grateful. But I don't think I shall be able to take it. When it is offered me, I mean. I should like to go to Cambridge for some things. I should like it no end. But I could n't go unless I'd made up my mind to stick to this sort of life for good. And I don't think I can do that."

"What's the matter with the life?"

"There's nothing the matter with it in a way, and in a way there's everything the matter with it. It's fine to be able to research, to be sure of time and liberty to do it. But that's not all. To spend one's life between library and lab., shut off from all the struggle and the fight out there." He nodded at the street. "To pretend there is no struggle. To go on making one's little discoveries, writing memoranda, reading papers, growing old and dried-up ——" he broke off with a suppressed vehemence.

Sanday nodded. "Like me," he said.

Mick made a choking noise in his throat and began with stumbling eagerness to explain.

Sanday cut him short. "Don't lie, Hearne," he said. "Of course you were thinking of me. Why should n't you be? I should, in your place." He leaned forward and began to talk with an earnest coherence, oddly at variance with the jerking

movements of his hand. The long, twisted face with its fringe of straggling hair took on a stiff, unwonted dignity. "I won't pretend, it's no use pretending," he said, "that the life we're offering you entails no sacrifice. It entails sacrifices which I can understand even better than you, though you may not believe that." A curious light flickered and died in his eyes. "It means giving up certain definite things. Cutting off parts of your activity. Leaving them to dry up and die. It means all that — and other things. Some one — a clever Jew — said that a politician should have a wife or mistress to whom he came with repugnance at night and left gladly in the morning. And if that is true of a little intriguing chatterer, how much more likely is it to be true of a man of science! For look you what science offers in return for your life. To take your place in a line that stretches back to the beginning of the world. That line runs like a white thread through the dark ages. It shines steadily in the myriad-hued radiance of Greece. It burns with a dark flame in the old grave ages of Empires that are dead — dead and vanished utterly from our sight, as if they had never been, with all their tale of men who strove and loved, and were jealous and brave, and made tremendous decisions and wrought themselves to great renunciations. All are gone, while science lives. Never a State or a faith that can show a bloodier roll of martyrs, or purer passion of devotion, or nobler achievement." His voice rose on an exultant note. "Where men fumble and lie to each other and themselves, science faces boldly to the truth and sets herself to *know*. Against all the ignorance and futile longings and nameless apprehensions that men have heaped up and called God, she opposes the deathless courage that will not be crushed by a fear out of the darkness or turned aside by comfortable lies. You give up — what is it you give up? Little strivings, restless, feeble longings — things too small to live in thought, and you get eternal life. Out of death into life."

He seemed to shrink in his chair. The lines of strain came back to his face and he ran a nervous hand through his reddish wisps of hair. "I mean," he stammered, "there's a lot you should think of before you decide to give up the chances we offer you."

When we were leaving he held Mick's hand in an absent sort

of way. "If you should," he said rapidly, "mind I'm not advising you to such a course—but if you should find that you must, in honesty, refuse the Cambridge scholarship, I might be able to help you to something else. The man on the agricultural experiment station in India is a friend of mine. I can't say anything more; I'd try to help you. But think it over. You'll have plenty of time before you need decide."

We left him standing in the doorway, peering into the shadows that deepened round him as he stood.

While we waited at King's Cross for the 'bus to Camberwell Green Mick discovered that he was penniless. I sought in all my pockets and found three-halfpennies and a Greek coin that was remotely like a shilling.

Mick eyed it doubtfully. "Do you think they'd take it?" he said.

"I don't think they would."

He darted across the road and I saw him offer the coin to a woman bulging behind the counter of a small fruit shop. When I reached them she was turning it over in her hand.

"Nay," she said, in a broad north-country accent, "I can't deawt wi' that."

Mick smiled like a little prattling child. "Tha wean't let a lad fra' t'owd spot gang trapsing ower Lunnon wi' nowt 's mich as a little rotten apple in 's pocket?" he said.

"Tha' comes fra' Yorkshire?" she cried. "Eh, lad tha 's welcome. Come thi ways in."

She led and pushed us into the small hot room at the back of the shop. A red-faced gowk of a lad was lounging in the rocking chair. Him she routed out and bade bestir himself to get the supper. We had such a meal as we had not seen since we left the North and departed at last with our 'bus fares in our hands and our pockets full of nuts and apples. Mick flung both arms round her. Apples burst from him and shot away in all directions. She groped for them and returned them to his pockets with tears in her eyes.

"Tha 's welcome," she said. "Tha 's welcome to a bit and sup as long 's ivver a 've got 'un. Him an' all," she added as an afterthought.

"That's a good kind soul," Mick remarked, as we climbed unsteadily to the top of the bus.

He grabbed frantically at the pineapple under his arm. "I feel like a Sunday school treat. Now, there's the scientific mind for you. I picked her out in the first place because she looked kind-hearted and I thought she might give me a few pence for the thing. But when she opened her mouth I could have danced for joy."

Next day we went north, glad at heart to hear again the deep, slow speech of northern tongues, breathe the good north air and look upon the gaunt hills and the golden vales that sleep between.

My mother seemed worn and tired. Her eyes shone when Mick told her that he had done well, done indeed far better than he had expected. He repeated Sanday's sparse praise with a mock boastfulness that annoyed her.

"And what next?" she asked sharply.

"Oh," Mick said, "Sanday thinks I'll be a professor before I die. They're going to offer me a scholarship to Cambridge. I have n't made up my mind about it yet."

She turned round at that, with a white-faced anger.

"Your mind," she said, "is it always to be your mind and what you want? Is it nothing to you that I have starved and scraped to get you the chance to study, that you can be talking of making up your mind whether it's all to be wasted and gone for nothin?" She held out her trembling hands. "Look at my hands," she said. "Cracked and spoilt, and seamed with black, so that you could keep yours soft and useless. How many lads of your age are keeping their mothers in idleness, while you — you." She choked. "Oh," she wailed, "what does one get children for and suffer and slave and starve for them? And they take it all as if it were nought, and think of nought but their own wilfulness. They're trouble and disappointment and a pain at the heart from the moment they're born to the moment you die and are free of them." She pressed her hand upon her breast. "Will you never know your own mind?" she cried bitterly, and left him standing, mute and pale, in the middle of the room.

"Will you come out with me, Joy?" he got out at last.

We tramped as far as Hackness that day, and Mick said hardly

a word. Only once, when we were lying in the heather, he rolled over on his face and cried impatiently — “Oh, to be out of it! Look you, Joy, if it weren’t for the mother and disappointing her I’d go to-morrow. I’d take Sanday’s offer and go to India.”

“How do you think you’d be better off in India?” I said. “You’d be taking yourself with you.”

“Myself’s good enough company,” he retorted. “And should n’t I be leaving behind all their stuffy professorial cant? Parochial socialisms. Sty morals. That girl——” he paused and left that. “I feel hemmed round by people all pressing me towards things I don’t want to do — or be.”

And later — “How can I know my own mind? What is in my mind?”

I sat that night in a corner of the Spa gardens. Through the windows of the theater the intolerable sweet crying of a violin came borne upon the dizzy air. The hidden surf murmured by the wall. All the wide dominion of the night was alive with a secret solemn movement. Only my mind refused its accord in the harmony. I was restless and fought against the tide that ebbed through the world and bore away the silly cries and silenced the brief laughter.

“What is in my mind?”

When we were children on the farm the women told us tales of men who came home late across the moor and took the short cut through the desolate churchyard. Woe to him who was so rash or stupid as to find himself there at midnight. For men had been known to return thence, dumb and blasted with the horrors they had looked upon. We imagined that a particularly grotesque idiot, who shambled through the village on hands and feet, had been one of these luckless ones. Nothing could persuade us to pass the churchyard after dark. It had indeed a gray and somber air, even in the sunlight. The heather that crept up to its very edge was always brown and dead beneath the crumbling walls. We gathered that it was scorched, and filled in the rest of the tale from the sermons of the Rev. Strut, who knew hell down to its red-hot cobblestones and the Devil as a dear friend.

I wondered that night whether a man might not be dumb and blasted who had looked only upon his own mind. “What is in

my mind?" A dreary upland, with rude altars stained by the blood of a dread sacrifice. Bestial forms that rent each other and defiled what they touched. A fear-stricken, naked thing that cowered under the crashing heavens. One that held yearning arms to the wonder of the sun. A man, pricked by a need greater than his fear, creeping and peering through the sacred groves to understand the mystery of the God. One who cried defiance and bared his breast to the lightning. One who looked with a strange new pain at an alien misery. One who ran and toiled with bleeding hands at the stones in the road beneath the feet of other men.

In a metaphorical burst of unwonted audacity, psychologists and philosophers have likened the mind to a stream. On the surface lie the conscious thoughts and desires, and far below run the hidden currents of impulses and feelings that rarely emerge into the light of day. The more geologically inclined talk of the strata of the mind. These similes and phrases seem too simple and tidy to hold more than a suggestion of the truth. I do not believe that the creatures of the mind — savage, wizard, skeptic, priest, Christ — inhabit an orderly mansion with the least reputable confined in the lowest dungeon, to emerge only at catastrophic moments. The savage will be found clothed in black vicuna, taking tea upstairs, or officiating at High Mass. His fears torment the skeptic and his lusts defile the Christ . . .

I thought of Sanday and his mind turned always to some ordered and wonderful vision of a world set free by Science. I wondered what bowed, mis-shapen creatures ran and scurried round the fringes of that disciplined march . . .

CHAPTER XIX

MICK promised my mother to accept the scholarship and stay in England. She would not hear of India. The name conjured up visions wherein naked savages crawled through jungles with knives between their teeth, and man-eating tigers leaped upon Englishmen in eyeglasses and white hats. Mick was very cheerful about his future. He talked a good deal of the day when the world would be ruled by the scientist. "Kings used to tremble before the wizard," he said. "The wizard became a priest and the priest a man of learning. There will come a time when emperors and plutocratic grocers will take their rightful place below the thinker who serves, not the greed of a few, but the good of all."

His enthusiasm burned with a fine flame, but it seemed to me that he fed it from himself, taking recklessly from his dwindling stock of ideals and ambitions to keep it going. He went down to the school to see old Silcox, and gladdened the dear man's heart with a hypocritical outburst about the gratitude and regret with which he looked back upon his schooldays. He even went to chapel with my mother. "Do I smell of sanctity, Joy?" he asked, when he came home. "I'm sure I ought to. I sat next to old Butterby, who starves his assistants and seduces his girls: he wrestled with God for an hour, right at my elbow. I got a whiff from the crystal sea."

He wrote to Olive at great length, and had in return scrappy letters that seemed to give him little satisfaction. "She's having a rare old time, punting and dancing," he said savagely.

My mother regarded him with a tremulous happiness. Even his brothers began to believe in his regeneration.

And then he went back on all his promises, threw up the scholarship, and left England without money or plans, or indeed any idea except to get away and be free.

We returned to London in September, I with a biological

scholarship, to study at South Kensington, and Oliver to finish his course. Michael came with us to make final arrangements for his post-graduate work. We met Sanday unexpectedly in the quad. He stared and blinked at Mick. "So you've given in," he said queerly. And then, in a different tone—"Most gratifying results, Hearne. We expect good things from your work at Cambridge."

Mick stood looking after him. "He's sorry I'm staying in England," he said slowly. "The funny old bird. After all he said."

The next day he took himself to South Kensington, and thereafter we saw little of him.

He had not expected to be in town more than a fortnight, but they kept him hanging on until the middle of December. It was a delay that altered the whole course of his life. If I had not been so preoccupied with myself I must have seen marks of the strain that was becoming unendurable. I noticed nothing. The end came quickly.

It wanted a week until Mick was due at Cambridge. He was never in before midnight, and one night did not come in at all. He turned up on the following evening, tired and dusty, full of a repressed excitement that showed itself in his restless movements from bookcase to chair and chair to bookcase. At last he tumbled the whole contents of his shelves upon the floor, and went down on his knees to sort them out.

"For goodness' sake, be quiet," Oliver growled. "If you don't want to work, you needn't prevent every one else from doing so."

Mick looked at him in swift amusement. "Did it have its brain rubbed the wrong way? So sorry. But keep cool: tomorrow you'll be quit of me for good. I'm off to South America on a windjammer."

Anthony grinned, and said—"Good enough." I glanced up for a minute, and went on with my work. There was a brief silence, and then Margaret pushed away her books.

"You don't mean anything, I suppose?"

"You're a bright crowd," Mick said. "A lot of stony-hearted, cold-blooded fishmongers. Next time I go to South America

I'll spare you the parting tears and the tender farewells. I'm damned if I won't. Where do you suppose I've been all day?"

Oliver opened his mouth and shut it again on the obvious.

"I've been scrounging round from Fenchurch Street to Tidal Basin, and I've signed on with the captain of a sailing ship that sails for Buenos Ayres the day after to-morrow. I'll be on board to-morrow night while you're bemusing your brains in this kennel, and moving down the river when you're sleeping the sleep of the damned and done-for."

We did not doubt his words at all.

Oliver said, "You fool."

Margaret spoke with a kind of wail. "Oh, you must be mad. A sailing ship. You'll die on the voyage. You've got no proper clothes. They're dreadful things: you've no idea of the sort of life you'll lead. You don't mean it."

"But I do. And as for clothes, there's a man going to have everything I want ready for me to-morrow."

"He'll cheat you," Margaret said, "and you've got no money. The life will kill you."

"Well, you don't suppose I'm going to spend all my days before the mast, do you?" Mick shouted. "It's only to get away. I'll find plenty to do in South America. I'm going to look up John Bellers, who went out there from King's last year. He does things with cattle somewhere in the Argentine. He gave me an address in Buenos Ayres and said it would always find him."

"Why not wait and see what Sanday can do for you?" I asked.

He shook his head. "I've got to get away now."

We gave in at last and tried to treat the matter in the proper spirit. Between us we could only raise seven or eight pounds.

"I could get you more," Margaret ventured, "if you'd wait."

Mick grinned. "You'll need more," he said. "You can't live on the memory of my sweet soul until next pay-day."

He stowed the money in an inner pocket. "Now," he said, "let's talk about ghouls or something really pleasant for a change."

We talked with a heavy-footed cheerfulness until Anthony and Oliver went to bed. As the door shut behind them, Mick

leaned back in his chair with a sigh. "They're good fellows," he said, "but our little brother is rather heavy in the hand, don't you think?"

Margaret laughed. "Why are you going to South America? Is it because of that girl?"

Michael raised his eyebrows. "Leading questions ruled out of order," he said, and became abruptly serious. "If I said that it was, I'd be telling about half the truth. It's partly Olive — but I guess I'd have gone anyway. She's only been one dissatisfaction among many. I'm dissatisfied with the sort of life I'd live if I stayed here. I'd get just like Sanday. You can imagine me in twenty years' time, with all my habits crusted on me, writing papers, lecturing, turning off my little jokes on succeeding generations of students like a mannered automaton. I could n't stand it."

"All professors are not Sandays," Margaret interrupted.

"No," he answered, "but I should have been. I can imagine myself just such a lopsided prodigy of work and nerves. I could never be a really sound and heavy-handed professor, but the academic atmosphere would have got at me just the same. There's no life in the English academicians. They exist in a kind of fine-spun unreality, getting fearfully excited about things that don't matter, and making awful fools of themselves when they come meddling into flesh and blood problems. They're warped by the tradition — like bishops. I should have had to stifle a whole part of me, and it would have worked its way out in a licensed eccentricity. Students would wax witty about my little ways, I should put jokes about the *pithecanthropus erectus* into my books, and have reviewers writing of my Gallic style. Poor devils, they're so used to the abysmal dullness of learned men that they lose their heads when they find one with a dawning sense of style. The whole thing — the whole scientific life, as it has to be lived in a commercial world — is one-sided and unreal. In a sense, it's the only real life: in another sense it's divorced from reality and exists on a deliberate make-believe of sham utility. Scientists are only tolerated because they make a discovery that will treble profits, or invent a new and ghastlier instrument of death. They're not expected to trouble about the destination

of the profits, or the use of their new explosives. They're servants who acquiesce in their servitude. They squirm with pleasure when some fat profiteer talks with his tongue in his cheek about the glories of science. They lap up that sort of insolence and sit on their haunches for more. Panders. That's what they are. Panders and pimps to the iniquitous system that bleeds the nations for the enrichment of a few. Do you suppose I could acquiesce in that sort of smug, unthinking treachery?"

"You need n't ——" I began.

"I know I need n't and I know I should if I stayed." He laughed, and leaned forward to poke a twisted paper into the blaze. His pipe lit, he gesticulated with the burning remnant. "I'm not giving myself the chance of going under to it," he said, and sat staring at the curling ashes in the fender.

"I've made a mess of things. They'll all think so — my mother, Silcox, the professors. They'll never understand. I don't understand it myself. I have a scientific genius. I'll never be happy until I get back to science in some form or another, and yet I could n't fit myself into the life that was arranged for me. I want something freer — or bigger. If the world were simpler . . . No, that does n't seem to have anything to do with it: life is simple enough for old Sanday, would have been simple enough for me. An artificial simplicity? That's nearer to it. The contrast between the sham peace of his life and the strife outside. From their laboratories they can see the strife, and they ignore it, let it grow fiercer and more bitter, driving on to some unthinkable disaster, powerless to avert it. I suppose they dare n't see it."

He must have been talking to himself.

"Am I making all this up? Trying to explain my failure to myself? Or is it true? Cloistered studies and laboratories where men gather up a science of humanity while, outside, humanity is maimed and spoiled and thwarted, wastes itself in blind, useless activities, struggles on in confusion and mismanagement to — I don't know where the struggle and confusion lead. One can't serve two masters. Be in the laboratory and in the struggle. Divided energies. Distrust from both sides. There's no coöperation, no call for scientific rule." He looked

up with a quick smile. "Do you remember the Samurai, and their Greater and Lesser Rule? That's fine, you know. Only a scientist could have thought of it. Only men who were scientists and rulers both could carry it through." His face brightened. "My life's only beginning, after all. I'll make something of it yet. But not here. I couldn't have done anything here."

"You see," he added slowly, "there'd have been other things to contend with." He hesitated. "I've made a *damned* mess of things," he said cheerfully. A reminiscent smile flickered round the corners of his mouth.

"I thought things were going wrong," he said. "When I was at home this summer I thought they were wrong. She wrote such queer letters. I did n't tell her I was coming up, and when I went to see her, of course she did n't expect me. There was a man with her, a pleasant-looking enough young fool. I thought the girl was trying to tell me something in the passage, but I took no notice of her and just walked in. They were standing close together, and the man seemed taken aback. He got himself away, and I turned to look at Olive. I suppose I was n't seeing things straight, but she looked different to me. I turned sick and disgusted. 'You don't seem pleased to see me,' I said.

"'Why should I be?' she said hardly. 'You did n't expect me to greet you with open arms after a letter like that.' She fumbled in her dress, and flung a letter on the table. It was the last I had written her. I suppose it had its share of bitter, ugly things, but she might have seen the pain as well. She ought to have seen it.

"'Who's that man?' I asked her.

"She looked at me for a second: I could n't believe it was really hatred I saw in her eyes. Then she said — 'He's quite a nice boy. A poet. I met him at a dance at Henley. He's a solicitor's clerk. You're not jealous, are you?'

"Jealous! Me! Of an embryo lawyer she'd met at a dance! I could have turned and left her then. I wish I had. I did n't, of course. I took her in my arms and let her soothe me and call me her cross darling. I wanted her so that I did n't care." He

laughed, a quick, low laughter that broke off in his throat. "She let me have her to keep me quiet."

He thrust his face forward in the firelight, with a half unconscious grimace of distaste. "It opened my eyes. I saw things I had n't seen before. Her attitude to her mother. The way her mother treated her, and the way she treated me. I sensed a conspiracy of silence — a mean, dirty silence. I used to swear I'd give her up, but I went back to her again, and she kissed me and stroked me. She's a pleasing little animal. Then one day I saw her coming out of a café in Regent Street with the rhyming clerk. He held the door open for her, and rested one hand on her shoulder. She was smiling up at him. I knew then. I knew, without any other proof, that she'd play me false, and lie about it, and I should believe her, and crawl for more lies . . . I went to her again that night for the last time . . . She does n't know about South America. They think I'm going to be a professor and marry her. I shall write her and post the letter on the quay. I was really taking my leave of her that night, only she did n't know it, and thought me very loving and deluded."

"That's rather horrible," Margaret said suddenly.

"To go like that?" Mick said. "You think it's not fair. Well, how have they treated me?" His voice rose. "My God, I sha'n't feel free — or clean — until I've put a continent between us. She's a fool, I tell you, a dirty little fool. And if I stayed I'd be no better."

"I was n't thinking of your — flight," Margaret answered. "I was thinking of that last night. It seems cruel, almost inhuman."

Mick stared. "I don't see that," he said, and then, with a sudden change of tone — "Margaret, my dear, are you sorry to lose me? We've been friends, eh?"

Margaret flung out her hands. "Oh," she cried, "if only you weren't going. I wish I were coming with you. I wish — I wish . . ." She broke into a fit of weeping. Michael opened his arms. She clung to him, and he soothed her as if she had been a child,

CHAPTER XX

MICHAEL had been gone two days when Margaret had a brief letter from Olive Champion. "I've got no claim on you," she wrote, "but I'd be glad if you would come and see me."

Margaret went reluctantly. "I suppose I'll have to go," she said. "Mick's little ways come rather hard upon his friends, though, don't they? You can meet me in the South Kensington tube station if you like, Joy."

She came about six o'clock. "I don't want to sit in a crowded train," she said. "Let's try for the top of a 'bus.'"

We were in Piccadilly when she spoke of her visit. Olive had come up to the situation in picturesque but trying fashion, "like a stricken mannequin, all in black soft stuff with a rose at her throat."

I laughed.

"No, I'm sorry I said that," Margaret cried. "She's hurt underneath it all — hurt and sore. She did care, I think; but he was n't enough of a fool to satisfy her properly."

"Was she — civil?"

"Oh yes. She was dreadfully dignified at first. 'Where has he gone?' she asked. I told her all we knew. Then suddenly she broke out — 'Oh, why did he go? I don't understand.' She almost wrung her hands. Her grief was incongruous somehow, as if an alien power had got inside a comic mask and was twisting and distorting it. She turned on me once. 'You've looked down on me — all of you. What does college teach a woman about love? I loved him better than any of you could — with all your clever talk. You've set him against me.' She rubbed at her tears. I could only stare at her. I felt stupid and ashamed. We *have* despised her, though not for the things she seemed to think. I was despising her then because she could give way like that, and talk so absurdly. She felt it, I think. She stiffened herself, and clutched at her rôle. 'You don't know

how I loved him,' she said. 'I gave him everything, all I had. My life is wasted and empty now.' My pity hardened a bit. I felt that she could n't give much."

Margaret looked at me with a rather twisted smile. "I'm a superior-minded beast, Joy, for all my pretense at freedom of thought."

"Oh, my dear ——" I began.

"Don't interrupt me," she said quickly. "You're upsetting all my psychological effects. Let me finish about Olive. I tried to tell her I was sorry, but she did n't believe me. I tried to make her feel that I was sorry, but she'd got back on to her farcical, pitiful dignity, and I could n't reach her at all. She *was* pitiful and yet I did n't feel sorry for her. It's not just that Michael is my friend. But her queer, deliberate pose would keep thrusting itself at me. She gesticulated like a marionette. In some fashion, her grief was real, but she was not. She had a moment of reality just before I left. 'I suppose he was bored,' she said. 'I remember he got bored with his work, although he was so keen on it and so clever. He got bored with London. He must have been bored with me.' Her eyes blazed. 'I think he is the most selfish man I have ever known,' she cried. When she was opening the door for me, I said awkwardly, 'If there is anything I can do ——' 'I want nothing of any of you,' she said quickly. 'I want to forget you. You've come into my life and hurt and spoiled it. I think I hate you all.' When I glanced back, she was still standing in the doorway, a stiff, tragic figure. Do you remember the dancing Columbine at the Coliseum, who died on Harlequin's body in such a fantastic travesty of despair? She was like that."

We waited two months for a letter from Mick. It came at last from a little village in the south-eastern part of San Miguel in the Azores.

He had fared worse than our worst fears. The captain of the sailing ship was a nervous, jumpy Swede, with a horror of the open sea. They dodged down the coast of Europe, and Mick was fearfully sick. The mate had taken a dislike to him, and they were hardly out of the river when he landed Mick a kick on the ankle. Mick hobbled round in a half-crippled state for a couple

of days and then his leg was so painful that he complained. The mate declared him to be a dirty malingerer, and forced him to go on working. He could not eat the food and he was half-dazed with pain. At last, when they were off St. Vincent, he was so clearly ill, and his ankle looked so ugly, that they debated whether to leave him. I daresay the mate was a little scared. The men were grumbling at the way he had treated Mick.

"A hefty brute, the only other Englishman of the crew — the rest were Swedes and Danes, and damn bad sailors they are — took a liking to me and swore to get him into trouble if I died."

And then, as Mick was limping about, he stumbled over the galley step and broke his leg just above the inflamed and swollen ankle. That settled it. Perhaps the mate reflected that if Mick died on board there might be trouble. Things are not what they were in the autocratic merchant service: the times are rotten with sentiment, and dead men have to be accounted for. If he died in hospital there would be an end to it, and so to hospital he went. He was delirious, and remembered very vaguely that he changed ships.

"Or perhaps it was only the ship's boat," he wrote. "But I seem to recall a little yellow-skinned man with a kindly face, who bent over me and poked at my ankle. He chattered in Spanish or Portuguese over his shoulder while he dressed my leg. Certainly it was already dressed when I reached the hospital, and lucky for me it was. The place was run by Portuguese monks and they were a queer crew. They never washed me or changed the bed-clothes or looked at my leg, the whole month I was there. A full belly maketh a kind heart, so I suppose they were kind enough. The only one I ever saw work was a lean, sardonic-looking son of God who came round twice a day with bowls of broth and boiled chicken. He used to sweep the room out now and then in a desultory sort of way. I don't know what his name was. I christened him Pedro, and he answered to it without any trouble. When I'd been there a week, he began to sit on my bed and talk to me. I thought he was an Irishman at first, but he turned out to be a Bavarian who'd lived in a North Irish monastery for six or seven years. My name deceived him into thinking I came from that distressin' country. He led off

with an astonishing attack on Irish priests. He said they were an intolerant and barbarous lot. He had seen a priest whip a woman once, and he kept coming back to it over and over again in an indignant sort of way. I was too weak to care much what he talked about, but after a while I roused up enough to ask him the cause of the chastisement. His indignation bubbled up at once.

“‘For what?’ says he. ‘Why, for human nature and nought else. He was a fool, that priest. He had all the unmarried women and widows joined together in a society he called Daughters of Mary. And he would have all the bachelors to be Sons of John. The young men held off, but some of the older ones came in for what they could get. This woman I speak of was a widow. Her husband was dead, and she a fine, upstanding woman in her prime, with never a wrinkle on her. There were two cottages she had, side by side, and one she let to a Son of John. What would you expect?’ He shrugged himself in an ungainly way. ‘There was a fine to-do when it all came out, and down goes the priest and whips the woman in her own garden, and puts a ban on them both. Of course, he took it off, but what good can come of stupidity like that? Bah, I spit upon all such.’

“And there’s a pretty tale for you. I don’t see that it has any relation to Home Rule, but you might put it to a suitable Orangeman if you can find one.

“He was a queer customer, that Bavarian monk. A mixture of knave and Simple Simon. You could never be sure which predominated. A huge Catalan monk called Daniela seemed to be the ruling power in the hospital. He extended his powers over the village, and acted as an unofficial judge in local disputes. They brought him one day a man — one Galdos — caught stealing fowls. It was a clear case: he’d been at it for months, and the peasants clamored for his blood. Old Daniela blazed and blasted at the thief, and soothed the peasants with promises of an awful vengeance. The thief was an engaging-looking scoundrel, and I felt sorry for him. ‘What will Father Daniela do?’ I asked Pedro.

“He looked at me slyly. ‘Oh, nothing,’ he said. ‘He dare n’t.

He's fathered too many of the rascal's children. Galdos has a rare wife — as dark as a gipsy, and holds up her head like a young mare. Father Daniela will keep him working here for a month and then let him out to run till he's caught again.'

"The old villain!' I said.

"That one? He cannot help himself: his mother was a thief, and his father a liar and a heretic.'

"I don't mean Galdos,' I said. 'It's Daniela I'm talking about.'

"Pedro revolted. 'A villain?' he cried. 'You are mad to say it. He is a good and generous man. He would give of his last crust to the needy. Moreover, he never asks favors of a woman. But he is of a pleasing figure. Women like a fat man. Fat men are comfortable and easy in their habits. A thin lover is passionate and too ready with his fingers at your throat.' Complacently — 'I was a passionate man myself in my youth.'

"Pedro told me that in a village another mile or so inland lived an English clergyman and his wife. The wife, he said, was — so — and flung open his arms to express an incredible elongation. 'The man pokes with his nose at you, and says — Ah.' Pedro twisted his face into a donnish solemnity. 'But perhaps they would assist you to communicate with your friends,' he finished delicately.

"I recited to Pedro the full tale of my accomplishments, and sent him to interview the English heretic. He promised Pedro to call, and did — the next day. I believe he thought I was at my last gasp, for he had, wrapped in a piece of brown paper, a surplice or a cassock, or whatever the devil it is they don to speed the souls of the departing. When he found me propped up in bed, digging in at a Portuguese grammar that old Pedro had discovered for me, he looked horribly taken aback and disappointed. He tried to conceal the cassock, but it was bursting out of the paper in all directions. He kept poking at it, and sitting on it, and tucking it under his arm, and dropping it on the floor and scrambling for it until I was dizzy. He entered upon a long account of his trials in a heathen land. I was so bored that I pretended to wander in my mind to get rid of him.

‘The elephant has drunk all the milk,’ says I, and rolls my eyes at him. It came out of the Portuguese grammar, but he did n’t know that.

“‘My poor boy,’ he says, ‘I’ll send for you. You must be got away,’ and off he hurries like a twig in the wind. I did n’t believe he’d do anything, but sure enough, a couple of days later he and his wife turned up at the hospital and haled me off in a horrible cart. Pedro stood mournfully in the doorway, watching me out of sight. He was a good man, was Pedro, and extraordinarily conscientious, considering the climate . . .

“That grammar was some book, I tell you. The first sentence in it ran—‘We have the oranges, but the foreigners have all the watches,’ which I take to be a horrid aspersion on the character of English fruit-merchants . . .

“Well, here I am, in a white-walled, picturesque house of incredible inconvenience. I fight a losing battle with hordes of spiders and sleep with my head under the sheet for fear one should drop on me from the ceiling.

“I can’t quite make out what the Holts are doing in this God-forsaken village. They had a vicarage near Cardiff. I believe—I may be doing her an awful injustice—that Mrs. Holt is the reason. She looks like a reformed kleptomaniac, and he adopts a queer, watchful attitude to her, which may, however, be part of the usual domestic amenities of an Anglican household.

“The ostensible reason for their exile is Mr. Holt’s great work. He is writing a book which shall once and for all settle the Arian question. The house is crowded with the Old Fathers; they fall on your head off shelves, lurk about in boot cupboards, trip you up round corners, and even find their way into the kitchen, where the little Portuguese wench uses ’em as hassocks and pastryboards. A lovely little thing, and Mrs. H. tracks me round like a bloodhound when she is anywhere near. A bloodhound in creaking corsets and bodices that hook up behind. Old Holt must spend half-an-hour on them every morning. Oh, voice that breathed o’er Eden, what Adam escaped! Oh, sacred wedded bliss! Their bedroom is next to mine and as the walls are made of thin wood, I have to listen to their nocturnal communings. Last night, old Holt began—‘My dear, it is abom-

inably close. I think I must really have a bed put in the spare room.'

"That would be unnatural. My dear parents never slept one night apart, except in illness, during their whole married life. They were married fifty-five years.'

"Unnatural! how sweetly natural that four withered limbs should be compelled to lie side by side in comfort and discomfort, year in and year out, until death releases 'em. My mind balks at the vision . . .

"I am supposed to be acting as secretary to the old boy, and to tell you the truth, I earn my board. The thing is hopeless, of course, but I'm doing quite invaluable work in sorting out notes and looking up authorities. I shall hereafter quote the Fathers with the Devil himself . . .

"He's a courageous old stick, you know, is Holt. Here he is, slaving away in a land he detests, for a Church that will never see or thank him for his service, preserving his English identity by talking a wretched dog-Portuguese and eating meat on Fridays — always brushed and active in a country that positively clamors for indolence and shirt-sleeves . . ."

There followed vague plans for his future. "When I've limped myself back to health," he wrote, "I'll get down to Ponta Delgado and set off again for South America and the unknown. 'I'd like to roll to Rio — roll really down to Rio — Some day before I die —' . . .

"There's a British Consul in the offing, of course, but I'd rather not, if I can manage any other way . . .

"I suppose you've seen and heard nothing of Olive?"

After "Your affectionate brother, Mick," was a sentence written jerkily across a corner — "I shall be very lame for the rest of my life, you know."

We looked at each other, and found nothing to say.

I took the letter to Sanday. He read it through with a peering earnestness and handed it back without a word. For a few minutes he stared out of the high window of the lab. at high peaks of clouds in a blue sky. Then he came back to the bench and stood there, picking up weights between the pincers and dropping them about a sheet of paper.

"Is he really lamed, do you think?" he asked.

"He says so," I answered. "I suppose he knows what he's saying."

"Strange," Sanday murmured, "he was so active. But what shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his soul?"

I did not get his association of ideas. I folded up the letter and prepared to go. He snatched at my sleeve. "You must n't hurry away like that. We must think what to do."

He sought vaguely in his pockets. "I had a letter," he said, "an important letter." He discovered it at last, so scrawled over with figures that he had to read it with one finger tracing along the lines.

"I wrote to my friend in India, after you had been to see me in Gower Street. I had an idea it would be necessary." He peered at me round the corner of his glasses. "He replied that he did not need any more assistants, but would recommend the young man to the Agricultural Experiment Station in Barbados. I think that's enough."

He darted at the door with an amazing activity. "We must cable—write—." I heard him pattering along the corridor, talking over his shoulder as he went.

BOOK II
THE EIKONOKLASTS: A SCHEME

CHAPTER I

MICHAEL left England in the last month of 1911. The days after he went were extraordinarily empty. Life was narrower, and in some way poorer and thinner. My own restlessness grew: I began to make secret plans for getting out of England. I wondered if Sanday could help me. A man I knew well at King's was going to Mexico on some doubtful errand to do with oil concessions. He said himself that he was engaged as a head-hunter. "You'd better come with me, Hearne," he added. "Climate along the coast like an afternoon in heaven. Girls, real girls, not washed-out color prints. Adventure, romance up-to-date. Make your know you're alive. Not like this." He waved a contemptuous hand at the somber, hurrying crowds.

Many times after he had gone, I wished I had taken the jesting offer. I talked to Margaret, boasted of the things I would do when I had got me away from a worked-out country. Afterwards, I sat and wondered at the incredible things I had said.

We went our way through the year of 1912, busied with many things. We were in the midst of activities that bore no visible fruit until the very early days of the next year. We met people: we made and re-made our plans. I feel that we were trying to blow life into things that were never alive at all. To be sure, we had, during this time, every appearance of life and liveliness. We ran about after people, and worked like slaves. We blew ourselves a great bladder of enthusiasm and mounted on it with perilous buoyancy.

The Scheme was born in Herne Hill. It was we who suggested it, and we who toiled like madmen to keep it going. And yet, from the very first, we had less pleasure and less faith in it than any of those who came round to help us. It is not that I think it was wrong, either in its intentions or in its effects. It taught us not a little, and knocked the more obvious conceit out of us. It worked well. It was appreciated. But it was wrong

for us. We should have left it to others. When I can take up again the work we dropped, I shall take it up altogether differently.

When we came to London we found socialism grimed and harassed from its toiling life in factories and workshops. It wore an air of bristling efficiency. It was up-to-date of the latest cog-wheel in the industrial machine. All that the older socialism lacked it had. It had technical knowledge and the sense of economic proportion. And yet we missed in it something vital, something that we stumbled on in other places and hailed with gladness: in a poem by Morris, in the untroubled thunders of an old Social Democrat, in odd, unconscious illuminations of minds, still unconverted to the one true and dried-up faith. From the first we felt ourselves awkward and alien in its whirring activities. We had to struggle against a numb, glowering stupidity that settled down on our minds in the presence of one of those gleamingly efficient young socialists from Oxford, shrewd, skilled experts, emitting sparks of commonsense at every pore. We tried angrily to drag him into contradictions, but he rode delicately and surely over our massed irrelevancies and left us unsatisfied behind.

We wrestled with our dissatisfaction. We read enormously in the latest pamphlets, and began to exude technicalities with vigor. And the sense of something lacking grew with equal vigor. I could not understand it. A curious piece of mental trickery enlightened me.

One bitter cold day I let the fire in our room go out. With a pile of reviews and a handful of damp sticks, grudgingly supplied from the kitchen, I tried to get that fire going before the others came in. The more expensive a paper, the less is it likely to set a brook on fire. The sticks spit and gurgled and would not catch. In desperation I seized the great bunch of heather we had brought from home to remind us that in Herne Hill we dwelt five haughty exiles. It was bone dry and the flames leaped through it. I squatted down before the blaze with one of those clear and irritating pamphlets. The blue smoke of the burning heather filled the room with a pungent, acrid smell. In the blinking of an eyelid I was in the farm kitchen. The wooden

settle ran from fireplace to door. The tall clock droned and wheezed behind it. On the flagstones of the hearth the peat glowed, smoldering. It murmured of brown streams trickling through the heather, of the close leaves of the ling, soft green lace of moss, the treacherous greedy butterwort, and the tall harsh belfries of the foxgloves in the disused quarry.

That conclusive beast of a little book was still in my hand. Impulsively, I flung it on the fire and the flames hissed and mocked. The ashes swept up the stone chimney and the moor wind blew them down the road the Romans made. With a clatter of sticks and tongues the others came along the passage, opening the door right through the phantom settle. "Who's burning peat, who's burning peat?" they cried. "The beast, he's burned the heather."

Rather bruised and sore in body, I reflected later on my impulsive contempt. I had burned that excellent and informative treatise because it was utterly out of place in the farm kitchen. Suppose Luke Pearson of Moor Acres had come in and picked it up, or John Wardle of Wardle's Close, how they would have spat their contempt! I would no more dare produce in a company of northern dalesmen those glib and reputable theories, the economic currency of the town, than I dare walk down the Strand in the leathern breeches that were my father's and then mine and Michael's and last of all Oliver's, before they came, at the auction, on evil days and alien legs wherein raced no drop of the dark Hearne blood. Indeed, I would sooner outrage the Strand: the folk there are kinder and more tolerant than the dalesfolk.

That second of insight taught me many things. It taught me that socialism, which had made more play with the land than has any other economic creed, knows least about it. Between the well-meaning, well-informed industrialist and the bulwarked stolidity of Luke Pearson and his nine great sons, is a gulf never to be bridged by exhortations and common sense.

Their days, rooted in ancient prejudice, are spent pitting a stark courage against the treachery of the moor that creeps to the edges of their fields, biding its time to take them back. To the tide that sweeps out from the towns and the cities they will

oppose the wall of their blind hatred of alien things. The harshness and the cruel strength of the upland dales is in that hatred. They are not stupid, the dalesmen, nor even uneducated. Many a one, like young Nathaniel Pearson, reads through the winter evenings when the animals are settled for the night. The winter I lived at Moor Acres he read patiently through "The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire." At the end of it he judged slowly.

"They were a good folk," said he, "but bloody minded and ower-hasty, and they had nobbut a poor sense o' justice."

"No sense of justice?" cried I. "What about Roman Law?"

"Now did I say aught o' law?" he retorted.

His father was given to like sweeping judgments on men and things. He had heard of socialism and did actually believe in the existence of honest socialists. But he argued that their honesty was due to lack of guts: the clever ones were all born scoundrels. By a queer chance, he had been in Paris during the Commune. When young Boulby got himself shut up there during the siege, his father the Squire could find no braver or wiser man to send for news of him than young Luke Pearson. A lad of twenty, who had never been out of his native dales, he got himself across the Channel and somehow into the city just before the start of the Commune. He found young Boulby, and kept that hare-brained youth from rushing headlong into revolution.

His opinion of the Communist leaders was almost kindly. "They meant well," he said, "but they were nobbut daft oits. Should 'a' done it thoroughly or let it be. Revolution bea'n't noa time for honesty: the daft gowks should ha' known that. Them others knawed it: reet well they knawed it. They dealt sorely wi' them honest fools. The streets were fair wet wi' revolutionist blood. Sick at heart I wor for the bairns they took an' shot for being communists. There bea'n't noa honest socialism. 'T is all folly and self-seeking. I doan't say but that some on 'em means well, reet well, but they knaw namore o' life than yon owd bitch. Ha' na truck wi' such. 'T is a mock and a delusion."

His hearers said "Ay" in their throats, and stretching huge arms, stamped slowly with great feet.

When you talk of the land and say what you will do with it, do you never think that the land has also two stout legs, two great arms, body like a tree trunk, and a mind rooted with Ygdrasil in the old earth? Legs and arms and body and mind that loathe and scorn your city faith, will have none of it, will spit on it, and oppose it with the strength of an earth-fast prejudice?

I know that this is so because I have felt in myself the painful tug of old instinctive hatreds. I have sat in the back of your halls and meeting-places, listening to the disciplined phrases of the modern socialist creed, and felt suddenly that had I the barns and farms of my fathers I would burn them to the last door-post before I would be torn from my fierce and self-ordered isolation. Were I Luke Pearson and had got me with such fearful effort a living from the grudging soil, would I not fight to the end against the new alien obedience demanded of me in a wise and socialist State?

Civilization is a failure, not because it is cruel or bloody, but because it has so ordered things that some men are cut off from the land all their lives, and others are rooted in it so fiercely that nothing else for them has meaning or value or any life at all. It is wrong that there should be a man living who does not somewhere touch the soil. It is wrong and wicked beyond belief that a child should be born and bred out of sight of the meadow grass and sound of the homing birds.

Men must work in towns, but their homes should be decently spread through the countryside. Before God, I swear this has nothing to do with garden suburbs, those middle-class travesties of the Manor and the Hall.

No man should have to live in cities, save from choice, and none all his life round.

During the whole of the time we worked with the socialists of London, we never met one who understood us when we told them of the immovable forces of the earth that they would surely have to face. They laughed and shrugged. A little earnest propaganda, a judicious pointing of the moral, would bring the dalesfolk into line with the workers of the busy outside world. So they said, and so believed.

We knew them wrong. Because they had not in them the murmuring of a voice deep with the sound of many streams and the memory of many men, should we be deaf to it who heard it in ourselves?

We were conscious always of our difference from the men who were our friends and fellow-workers. Even Mick's freakishness was based on something hard and stolid, and slow to move as the hills themselves. Our life had been different, bearing a heritage of sorrow lightly, as the green earth bears the burden of many feet . . .

There are times when I hate the very thought of the moorland. I think of her stretching bony arms down into the fertile valleys, greedy and menacing, taking every year her toll of human life. And then I see her in her ripe loveliness, decked with the yellow gorse, twisting in her hair the red clusters of the mountain ash. She has crooked an elbow round the stark, gray rock and let her fingers rest in the narrow creeks of the sea. She smiles tenderly and proudly, dreaming of her triumph and her sorrow.

But in winter the wind tears through the black heavens, and the hollows are filled with dark, bitter water. Then a man crossing the moor reels on the flinty path, and the walls of the cottage quiver and strain in the storm. The wet peat burns slowly, and the wind rushes under the door, lifting the carpet in little billows across the floor. A man must have good thoughts who would live alone on the moors.

I belong to the moor. It is because I know that, and knew it all along, that I was uneasy and ill-contented in the work we began in London. I shall go back to my own place and begin afresh.

CHAPTER II

HOW am I to write the story of these years? No sooner do I get me in the way of an orderly account than my mind thrusts out odd scenes to trip me up and call me halt. Am I to ignore them for the order's sake? And if I do, shall I have robbed my tale of half its sense and savor?

I do not know why I, sitting in the sun on the dried pine needles, should remember all at once an obscure, ill-lit café, and myself at a corner table, bending across to Margaret's sweet face. It is not one of the cafés we frequented, and I do not know what we are doing there. Before I have time to consider, another memory has elbowed that one out of the way.

We are making one of our rare intrusions upon Olympus. The Duke is in town. Margaret and I and his son have lunched with him in Soho.

"It's twelve o'clock," he said. "At two we lunch again. We'll all go to see Jane. Jack, you neglect your Aunt Jane. You shouldn't do it, my boy. She'll be useful to you one of these days. A determined woman, and as unlike your mother, sweet saint, as a sister could be. Jane reverts to type, I think. Her father stuck pigs in Chicago, and I'll be bound it was a decenter sight than one I saw in India. All drugged to a pig, my boy, and his lordship shot 'em in droves. It was a Gadarene massacre."

We doubted whether Jane, Lady Cricklewood, expected us.

The Duke stared. "What's that to do with it?" he demanded. "Ain't I taking you? My dear," he said to Margaret, with a sorry echo of the gallantry that had shadowed his sweet saint's life, "she should be honored to have you at her table."

We did, indeed, pass almost unnoticed. Lady Cricklewood kissed Jack on the forehead, and smiled very kindly on us. She might have been relieved that we were no worse. Jack told me that his father took the queerest people to lunch with Jane.

Once it was a large shabby journalist who roared all through the meal in a deafening voice. The ends of his mustache dragged in the coffee, and he wiped them on his tie. He could not use his napkin because he had thrown it away.

Almost always, the people whom the Duke brought regarded the rest of Jane's guests with an aggressive contempt. She rebelled at last, and told him that he must come alone or not at all.

He answered her solemnly. "My good Jane, if you cannot see fit to bestow your hospitality upon me and my friends, I shall go on the stage and have my own and my wife's family history in all the papers."

Jane quivered and collapsed: the Chicago pigs were the least of her ancestral shortcomings, and she dwelt precariously in places still unravished by mixed breeding.

The lunchers that day were austere varied. His aunt, Jack said, was secretly bored by her pure-bred relatives. She tried to escape from them by developing a mind. This she did in the two most reputable directions—the high political and the distinguished literary.

"There they are, all three together," Jack said. "That horse-faced frump is my aunt's sister-in-law. Inbreeding produced that nose. The dreamy-eyed haberdasher on her left is Bloomer, the new sociological novelist. Out-Wells Wells, you know. The other side of him is political—wife to a Cabinet Minister, I think."

Lady Cricklewood directed the conversation with a heavy zeal. In the one moment that it slipped her, it turned on divorce. There may have been a Commission sitting: I do not remember.

Bloomer turned on his right-hand neighbor a face that quivered with intelligence. "Something should be done," he urged. "Don't you think so? What is your opinion? How do you view these things?"

The thin lips opened for a trickle of icy sound. "Do they require thought? It has always seemed to me that nothing but an instinct for what is base could explain this yearning for license that has come upon our race. I have always blamed America. But do you suppose that the infection could have so spread if we had not been maliciously, insidiously weakened

by unbalanced minds and a foolish sentimental government?"

"You mean, dear lady——?" the novelist murmured.

"I mean this pandering to the mob. Giving them to read. They're not fit for it. Ideas get into their heads and they can't judge of them. The lower classes are drunken with the license we have allowed them. Oh, I know it is usual to flatter them. There is not a journal that dares tell them to their face that they are narrow, servile fools."

"But," ventured the Minister's wife, "has n't it caused great hardships among the poorer people—the difficulty of divorce, I mean?"

"Suppose your wife is in the lunatic asylum," the Duke grunted.

He got no further, for Lady Cricklewood's voice rose and settled down upon him like a clumsy bird.

"Pray, my dear John," she gurgled, "don't inflict upon us one of your heroic outbursts. We know just what you are going to say, and just what value to place upon it. In the first place, these creatures' sense of decency is in a quite elementary stage, and requires less, not more indulgence. And in the second place, you exaggerate the hardships."

Her sister-in-law interrupted. "There is nothing to be said upon the subject. The best spiritual advice is quite clear that no possible circumstance can justify the sin of re-marriage. Say adultery, rather. Trials are for purification: the harder and more bitter our suffering, the greater will be our reward. Lust may be legalized. It cannot be sanctified." A mottled flush spread over her face.

The novelist intervened, and Lady Cricklewood boomed her way placidly through the rest of the meal. There was only one break, when the Cabinet Minister's wife took courage to wonder why the people should not reach a point where they would be fit to rule themselves.

"Why should we rule them?" she said, with a pretty, flushed insistence. She opened her eyes very wide and fixed them on Bloomer. He blinked, and tripped across the ice on agile toe.

"I must nail you for my next book. You shall be my aristocratic heroine, sweet and bold-minded, and full of illuminating

remarks on the social chaos." This is not what he said. I think it is what he thought. ✓

"My dear," Jane said kindly, "there is no earthly reason why they shouldn't rule themselves and us, but they've got to be bred to it. And is it likely we shall hasten to breed our masters?"

Bloomer had a moment. "It might be better to breed them," he said, "than to leave them to chance."

I believe we were unfortunate in our Olympians. They cannot all be so purblind, so obstinately, magnificently obsessed by their possessions. Probably Chamberlayn, with his ideal of a comfortable, well-mannered, and docile democracy is nearer the modern spirit of them.

Two nights later Oliver and I dined at the Kensington cottage. As dinner progressed, the Duke began to get excited by the quantity of wine he drank. The unpleasant side of him peered out. He joked maliciously with the old cousin.

"Ah, Mary," he said, "I suppose I shall not keep you much longer. Some fortunate man will storm the virgin fortress and carry you off, and my little home will be desolate."

The poor thin hand shook, and a flush crept into the wrinkled cheeks. She looked pitifully at us.

"You're at the dangerous age, you know, my dear."

But at that, she lifted her withered neck in its yellow laces and struck like a feeble serpent.

"I am no older than you, my dear John, but I thank God I have learned a little to respect myself and my fellow-men."

When she had gone, he grew moody and irritable. He turned on his son with a mulish rage.

"Don't contradict me," he cried. "Am I your father? Then treat me as such, or by God, I'll let you know what it is to set yourself up against me. 'Pon my word, I don't know what boys are coming to. In my day, your grandfather would have had me whipped by the groom if I'd dared as much as lift an eyelid against him."

With a suddenness that startled us, he was transformed into a broken old man. His shoulders drooped against the high straight

chair, and in the light of the candles his face was incredibly aged and woeful.

"You all draw away from me," he said. "Have you not the right? Who respects the withered mountebank? Don't I sing for my supper like any clown?"

This was horrible. Jack sat miserably staring at the wall.

"Poor Mary and I are the same rotting branch," he murmured. "And I have grieved and offended Mary. I, who alone knew what she has suffered. Was n't I there when her lover was murdered?"

A gleam came into his eyes, and he smiled round the table. "Boys," he said, sitting suddenly upright, "there's a tale for you. The blood runs through me to remember it. 'T is a paltry knock-kneed crew ye are by the side of your fathers. I'll not tell ye his name," he said cunningly, "ye know it too well. We were friends, but the brains were all his. He would ha' been Prime Minister before now, I tell ye. He was marked out for it. And then the fool must get into a mess with a harlot on the other side. Her husband called him out: he knew he'd be ruined, anyway, for they had it all laid to spread the tale abroad. He fired into the air, and took the other man's bullet clean through his lung. He was to have married Mary the following week. It was me took the news to her, and devil a word did she say, but within the year she'd hounded that yellow-haired baggage to disgrace and poverty. She came whining to Mary for mercy, and Mary had her shown out of the back door." He lifted his glass. "Come, boys," he roared, "drink to the men who had red blood in their veins, and the women who drove it mad. Drink, I tell ye."

After a while he began to dwell with an unctuous pleasure on the hypocrisy of well-known men. He spoke of a famous Socialist.

"Shall I tell you why he's incorruptible?" he said. "Because he makes his money out of sixth-rate cafés. He has shares in them all. He stands and talks of the evils of the streets, with his eyes rolling to heaven and his hands in his pockets, jingling the money he makes by paying girls wages that drive 'em to the

trade. I daresay he has shares in Beer, for he's a rare temperance man. I'll write an article beginning—'I appeal from Honest sober to Honest drunk . . .'

We roared with laughter. We never knew whether the tale were true or not, but we made use of it to annoy Kersent.

He wandered off among the incidents of his youth, lingering wistfully over the more indecent of them. When we left, he was beginning to instruct Chamberlayn, with much emphatic detail, in the methods of acquiring a rich wife.

We walked past the great, shadowed buildings in silence. As we stood shivering in Trafalgar Square, Oliver said abruptly—
"Do you suppose we shall get like that lecherous old beast?"

We had not done with fathers. When we got home, we found Anthony sitting gloomily over a letter from home. He handed it to us without a word. It ran:—

"MY DEAR SON,

"I was very much surprised to receive your request for money. As I explained to you when you took the scholarship for college, you must not expect help from me. Your scholarship allows you, when all your fees have been paid, at least twenty-five shillings a week, exclusive of the many weeks when you enjoy the shelter of my roof and food at my table. Purely as an act of grace, I have given you at various times during the past three years, sums that amount to more than eighteen pounds. When you began your college course, I predicted that you would lose all sense of proportion on finding yourself able to handle and dispose of money without guidance. It grieves me to see my fears justified. You further write that upon leaving college, you expect to get a good position as lecturer at an agricultural college, and will then repay me the sums you have borrowed—I might say, acquired from me. Since I have no guarantee, either that you will obtain such a post, or will see fit to remember your debts, you can hardly expect that I shall imitate your rashness and accede to your demands, which may well be limitless. When will you learn to cut your coat according to your cloth? As I did not, however, wish to act without due reflection, I carried the question to the

Lord, last Sabbath evening. It was made clear to me that I should be acting with criminal weakness did I give further rein to your extravagance or create further opportunities for you to debase your mind, your morals, and your health by frequenting a low music hall. You talk as if assured of a prosperous future. But let me tell you this: by no clever trickery can profligacy and low living be brought into possession of the beatitudes.

"David was to-day ploughing the hill field. Your mother grieves sorely over your fall. She sends her love, in which I join.

"Your loving father,

"JAMES CALVERT."

"What was it you wrote for?" I asked.

"Money to pay my examination fees," Anthony said. "How the devil does he think I can get that out of twenty-three shillings a week? I know for a fact that he turned over close on a thousand last year. I've never asked him for anything but money to buy books. Fact of the matter is, he has never forgiven me for taking that scholarship and so getting out of his control. He treated me like a dog or a slave, and would have gone on doing it until I was gray-haired. He treats David that way. David's only a year younger than I am, but he dare n't open his mouth at table unless he's spoken to, and then it's only to say — 'Yes, father — No, father.' And he's slaved on the farm since he was twelve years old, doing the work of two hired men. He hates it: he was a far better pianist than I shall ever be, and his fingers have got so thick and stiff that he can't strike the notes and he's ashamed to have people see them. The queer thing is that my father seems to dislike David, faithful, respectful David, as much as he dislikes me. He hates David's subservience, though he has insisted upon it, and beaten the poor lad down to it. As for me, I believe he loathes the sight of me since I left home. He's persuaded my mother that I'm sunk in sin, and degraded beyond belief . . ." Anthony laughed shortly. "If you can beat for meanness your real narrow religious bigot . . . Dirty-minded, prying . . ."

With a sudden change of tone, he added lightly — "It was n't

God told him I'd been to the Coliseum. He's been at David's pockets again, thieving my letters to him."

He began turning out his own pockets. He had a shilling and a few pennies.

"To profligacy," he said, "one-and-sixpence. Account closed."

CHAPTER III

IT was during the hurrying months of this year that Margaret and I prepared our own pitfalls. We had been good friends from the first week of her coming to town. When Michael began to spend his time at South Kensington we were left to ourselves almost entirely. We worked and talked and discovered London together. I found myself mentally noting things that must be brought to Margaret for her criticism. We lived in each other's minds.

There was no sense of disloyalty to Keith in our friendship. Why should there have been? The disloyalty would have begun with the fear of it. For more than two years we went our unconcerned way.

I have a vivid remembrance of the moment when I knew that Margaret was very dear to me. The moment should have warned me — might have warned me, had I not been in such fierce revolt against the filthy old respectability that runs frantically about shrieking — “Oh, for God's sake don't let our boys and girls get intimate. They'll fall in love. All sorts of disgraceful things will happen. Keep 'em away, keep 'em off. You'll destroy the romance; they won't fall in love. The birth rate'll go down. There'll be no babies. There'll be too many babies.” I shut my ears.

We did fall in love and we set our teeth and took our punishment. Now were the scratching old men justified? A thousand times no. I tell you we had rather go through it all again, suffer as we suffered, endure the searing madness of regret, than give up one moment of our brief, defiant joy. Margaret, my beloved, to have had you in my arms, to have felt your lips against my throat, were worth a hundred lifetimes of ease and little loves.

I write like a fool, clumsily on big sheets of paper, a man scrawling in the dark. I shall not see your face again, nor pine

trees black against the golden air. A fool, scrabbling in the past . . .

You see that we did not come on love quite unawares. Margaret must have had her warnings just as I had. We could have stopped it — at one time. But we did not stop it. That would have meant the sacrifice of things we valued more than we cared to realize — an intimacy so rare and delightful that we feared to spoil it by thinking about it.

I do not fall into the mistake of thinking ours an uncommon story. Friendships between men and women — friendships of a closer and freer nature than was possible in the past — are nowadays not only possible: they are inevitable. Almost as inevitable is their ultimate conflict with an unyielding moral code and the result in disaster, social or personal. For us, there was more than the mere legal barrier: there was all the dread pressure of centuries of mute repression and suggestion that weakened and confused us. It is clear to me that if you are going to allow this freedom of intercourse between men and women, somehow or other those repressions must be removed. The alternative is a return to the harem ideal of Victorian ages.

I do not believe such a return to be possible. I believe that if the social code will not stretch to the new ideals of personal freedom it will have to be broken and re-made. It is useless — it is worse than useless for mitred old men in gaiters and aprons to run round like flustered hens, crying “sanctity of marriage” in the face of a problem which may very well be disastrous to civilization unless it is tackled by subtler and less feeble hands.

We paid heavily, Margaret and I, for the chance we took and lost. But what price does a man pay for the caution that halts him at the beginning of friendship with a “For goodness’ sake, be careful, you might fall in love and have no end of trouble . . . ?”

It was a very little thing that set our feet in the road we trod gaily to its appointed end. Who would have believed that the momentum could come out of the Grafton Galleries?

The years just before the war were full of an amazing stirring in the graveyard of the arts. Poets whose eyes had for half a century been set backwards in their heads were brutally thrust

aside. Artists and sculptors wearied of competing with the attractions of the popular novelist and the illustrated papers. So far as we were concerned the new art leaped upon us in the Exhibition of 1912. We went to jeer and came away in a state of incredible exultation. Margaret wanted to hire a taxi and drive madly round the town. We found ourselves instead in a café, drinking detestable tea, eating quantities of black sticky cake and talking in eager undertones. After all these years I feel a faint throb of that amazing experience, youth making instinctive answer to the tempestuous morning energy of a new art. Even when we had narrowed our admiration down to a dozen pictures, there remained with us that sense of peaks in Darien.

I remember sunlit villages and a road that wound round a high place into infinity, and priests in a chapel whose shifting walls changed beneath our eyes, sweeping back to the edge of the world.

In a corner, I came across a picture that had for me the queer attraction of distant lights seen faintly in the sea-filled night. A road, scarred by white cart tracks, ran gray and stark between stark trees—a mountain road, still and desolate, and chill with the austere chastity of the heights. I came back to it again and again. I would have sold all that I had to buy it, if I had had anything to sell.

Oliver frankly loathed the new art. He said it was indecent, like an old aunt kicking her legs in a flurry of green and crimson petticoats. "I don't want to be excited and stirred," he said. "Art should soothe me. Is n't there disorder and chaos enough in the world without glorifying it in paint?"

The rest of us quarreled furiously with him, but to no purpose. He said that he had asked the policeman at the entrance to the Galleries his opinion of the paintings. The policeman replied that for his part he could see neither art nor beauty in them.

"Look here," Oliver said one evening, after a bitter argument, "it's not that I want to be perverse and different. But I can't like the stuff. It disgusts me. You say it's a return to the primitive. Well, I say you can't return to the primitive like that—not in human decency. It's like Nebuchadnezzar eating grass.

It's natural for the beasts of the field, but for a man it's just beastly."

"Well," Margaret said unexpectedly, "in a way I agree with you. But after all, there must be something about an art that could produce the Mountain Road — if it never produced anything else."

"You liked that?" I said quickly. "It reminded you of things — moor roads — ?"

She looked up with a smile, and the firelight fell suddenly across her face. I caught my breath, dazed with a sense of her beauty, and filled with a wild, half-realized desire. The moment passed, and the mood with it, dropping back into my unconscious mind to bide its time . . .

It was, perhaps, unfortunate that we chose a day of blazing sunshine to show Margaret the National Gallery. She came away chilled and depressed.

"I don't know what I expected," she said, "but nothing so monumentally heavy."

The Rossetti and Burne-Jones pictures annoyed her. "When we had a headache," she said with seeming irrelevance, "or any other ailment, my grandfather came thundering into the house and told us that a good day at the wash-tub was all the cure we needed. Those women want a house-full of work and a day at the wash-tub. Spineless horrors."

At the end of an hour she insisted upon coming away. "I'm sick of fat Venuses," she said.

Oliver, whose idea of feminine beauty was just a plump, pink Venus, remonstrated scornfully. "Look at the color," he said, "and the line. You've had no training. We oughtn't to expect you to appreciate the real thing when you see it."

"I don't see any line," Margaret told him courteously, "only a lot of lines, and if training means groveling before all those fleshy mountains and those picturesque posters (Turner's sunsets, oh, Margaret!) I'm glad I never had any."

We were happier at the Museum. Margaret could hardly be got out of the Egyptian gallery. She stood in front of Amen Hetep III and talked about the line and the eternal verities.

"Who's groveling now?" Oliver triumphed. "And who's

degenerate? I have no patience with the attitude of mind that comes and swoons about in an ecstasy of abasement before mere bulk. 'Oh, what a hell of a lot of stone! What a worm is man!'"

Margaret flushed a little. "Well," she said slowly, "I don't think that the bulk counts here. It seems to me that a statue should be perfect and universal — should n't, I mean, have any of the restless strivings of music, or for the matter of that, painting. That's why I like this better than the Greek. It is serene and immutable — a symbol of human dignity and power. I like its gravity — 'eternal lids apart.' You know, Joy?" she appealed.

"Yes, I know," I said, "you mean that after the courage and beauty of the Belvedere Apollo classic art gets nearer and nearer the drawing-room and farther from the temple."

"That's just it," she said eagerly, "until the bust of Cæsar is full of modern dissatisfaction and unrest. It might be a Rodin. Look at that faun. It does n't belong to woods but to an ornamental garden. It is Versailles, years and years before a Louis drew his sacred breath."

We led Oliver away and fed him on buckwheat cakes in a little American café. Even they did not please him. "Linen with an undernote of flannel," he said, and took all my maple syrup with his own. Margaret laughed.

"Have half mine, J. J.," she said.

When we left the lights were lit and the streets a fantasy of black jerking limbs and white faces, sharp and mask-like in the yellow light. We were filled with an irrational happiness and our feet trod the streets of fairy . . .

I suppose that the real bitterness of the attack on the new art was rooted in an unconscious hatred and jealousy of its arrogant youthfulness. For after all, this is an old men's world, reverencing age, ruled by the cautions of old men, listening eagerly to any senile mumbling that wags a beard and smells of the grave. On every side the questing mind of youth comes up against the inert forces of toothless ignorance and the traditions of the herd. The traditions may be fine, may even be necessary or useful, but we are not allowed to satisfy ourselves on that

point. Impulses and desires that alarm the natural and seemly timidity of old age are checked, and by an ancient cunning the prohibitions are given the force of divine law. The fat patriarch, greedy for wives and cattle, terrified lest audacious young men should snatch the power from his stiffening hand, created a God who was ashamed of his works and displeased by the naked splendor of youth and young desire. And the prohibitions so created have come rolling down the ages, gathering dust and weight as they came. You can see the process going on to-day: is it not common talk, that above all things God shrinks from a fair distribution of wealth and leisure, quivering in all his planets at a socialist success . . . ?

The truth is that half the prejudices of the social code do not fit the facts of modern life. They never fitted the facts, but only facts seen through the fear-distorted vision of old men, and strengthened now by such forces of ignorance, jealousy and age-long repression as to be well-nigh unassailable by reason. We let youth blunder into a world dominated by a tradition which wars with his every feeling and the witness of his senses, his feeling for justice outraged by shameful injustices condoned and practised by rulers of states; his impulse to decent frankness blunted by the indecent and furtive stealth with which we approach the most important things in life; his instinct for beauty and splendid dreams twisted and crushed out altogether by the squalid makeshifts born of indolence and greed.

One of two things happens. He achieves that indifference which is called good citizenship, or he wastes his energy in a passionate and foredoomed struggle against the ancient lies of the social order. Am I making too much of a common lot? Is it nothing that energy, courage, and the desire for service which is in youth, should be lost to a world that has sore need of all these things?

I have thought sometimes that the radiant courage of those paintings was the forerunner of some youthful renaissance. And then, out of the blunders and pompous trickeries of the past, rose and swept upon us the incredible and cataclysmic torrent of the war. The old men sowed the whirlwind and youth went to a bloody harvesting. This is an old men's war, fought to save

ideals put in peril by their acts. Never was a war so applauded and embittered by bloodthirsty old men, achieving a vicarious youth through the life and death of their sons.

If youth ruled, do you suppose it would waste energy and its short span of years in such a beastly, bloody carnage as this? With all the disorder and misery of the world to right, the squalid, wasted lives to straighten, knowledge unachieved, a universe unconquered by the acolyte sciences? I do not believe it. The desires of youth are finer than that.

I pray to die before I grow a timorous old man, impotently greedy of life, fouling and betraying the splendid ensigns of my youth. Better be out of life altogether than in it thus. I have had great joy of life. Is it a poor thing to have watched the paling stars flicker and die before the rushing sun, to have known love as I have known it, standing between the murmuring black wings of the night? Is it nothing to have lived, known friendship, rain, wind, bright waters, and the unimagined miracle of light?

CHAPTER IV

IT was borne in upon me slowly that Michael's departure had started a subtle disturbance in the balance of power. From being intermittently aggressive Oliver went on to an attempted despotism that, while it lasted, made our lives a burden to us. He would argue with Margaret, and after shouting her into silence, hold forth in a roaring voice on art, on his own poems, on the craven timidity that neglected poets, on everything that could be dragged, kicking and protesting, into connection with his future greatness.

"I'll make them listen to me," he bellowed. "I'll ram poems down their silly throats. I'll recite 'em in the Strand. I'll force them to respect me."

"The world's mine egg-shell, and I'll bash it in," Anthony murmured.

Oliver reduced his friends to a hostile pulp. We shrank from crossing him. He read us his poems in cafés and public places until he must have laid the foundations of a legend. His red hair bristled and he gesticulated like a madman. His poems at this time alternated the bawlings of a Fleet Street superman with a morgue-like atmosphere of death and pale women. The pale women became an obsession.

"Look here," Anthony said at last. "This is for your good. Unless you can get rid of that air of excessive weariness and gone-to-my-hole-to-die attitude, people will never be interested in your stuff."

The pale women disappeared from his poems, and he began to write a quantity of verse that he did not read us. Searching among his shelves one day, I came upon a whole sheaf of poems pushed down among the books. They were one and all addressed to Margaret.

The thought of Oliver riding out to make love with a poem

in one hand and a bludgeon in the other struck me as so extremely funny that I sat on the floor and laughed.

This explained things. It explained his attitude to Margaret, his extraordinary self-assertion. I understood that I had suspected it all along.

I do not think that I was at all sorry for him. For some reason or other, my mind has always refused to credit love with an aspect of tragedy. I do not see love ever as tragic. And this in spite of the reality and intensity of my own futile desire. At times I sorrowed like a madman. I talked of my agony, to myself, to Margaret. And yet I could never, at my most preposterous moments, persuade myself that I was a tragic figure, or that the thwarting of our love and our unrealized dreams was in any fashion tragic. At the back of my mind I knew that they were not. I have always known it.

But when I had to see Oliver in the attitude of desperate lover, I lost all sense of decency. I rocked and roared with laughter. I thought it irresistibly comic.

I do not believe there was any malice in the laughter. No more than the unconscious malice inextricably mixed up with the finest of our thoughts and ideals. Whatever else there may be in the universe, kind gods or evil, there is also assuredly a spirit of malice that was awake and biding its time before ever life quivered in the primal mud.

It was malice made the disturbance that started this ancient mischief of life.

Love is a ridiculous passion. I have felt it to be so at the very height of my own desire, while my body throbbed to the touch of cool lips. Something destructive lurks in my mind, emerging round the corner at the most uncalled-for moments.

We have made love ridiculous with all the trappings of chivalry and the ceremonial posturings of betrothal. They are comic, those two creatures who prance and clutch and parade an elaborate mimicry of passion before the cynical discretion of experience. Two ludicrous little creatures . . .

It cannot all be laid to the account of civilization. Even savages go through ceremonials that differ not at all in spirit from the decent weddings of cultured folk. Animals and birds,

and I suppose insects, have their own ceremonies of rivalry and parade. The ridiculousness of man is rooted in the very springs of his life . . .

All the artists I have known have been very garrulous men, greedy of sensation, and drawing all experiences into the glowing center of their self-glorification. They hold that the purpose of life is art — that is, their own art. That first stirring in the mud, is in their sight a stirring towards the perfect picture and the Wyndham Lewis.

Only by reducing words to a pithless mush can life be said to be art, or art life. Art at its best is only one expression of life's multiplicit unity. The most expressive art is the most social-minded. Unconsciously, our artist knows this, when he tries to make his work a door upon the universal.

But in his conscious mind the wretch forgets his super-conscious knowledge. He peacocks about, screeching the importance of his paltry self. He forgets that the only great thing about him, often the only tolerable thing, is the stream of powers, memories, and visions poured into his mind by generations of men who strove and dreamed before him.

The super-consciousness of the artist is quick and complex beyond our understanding. His conscious mind is often at a lower stage of development than that of the plodding scientist of his scorn.

I do not know whether this will help you to understand Oliver at all. He is indubitably an artist. His art shook free of that early nonsense with amazing ease. It has nothing in common with the blustering and ranting of his common speech. Yet, in everything but his poems, he is as clumsy a roysterer as ever broke noses and gave away his last shirt.

His love-making was doubly ridiculous in the mirror of Margaret's critical habit of mind. I believe that at first she did not credit his love. She had all her share of the diffidence that goes with a critical intellect. A little incident helped to open her eyes.

We had spent the whole day walking about Epping Forest. We lunched at "The Owl" on bread and cheese, and escaped with difficulty from the clutches of Boccaccio, who was sitting outside

the inn door in a patch of sunlight, bleared and shivering in his rags, dreaming of olive groves and full of disreputable songs. We reached home tired out, and lounged about the room in varying stages of exhaustion. Anthony improvised weakly for a while and then took himself to bed. After he had gone, Oliver dragged Margaret into an argument. He was more than usually aggressive, and she lost her temper.

"'Pon my word, you are conceited," she said hotly. "Drop some of it. What have you ever done to justify your idea that you are the people and that wisdom will die with you?" She recovered herself quickly. "I'm tired. Don't let's quarrel."

Oliver said nothing. He sat for a while with a sullen purpose growing in his mind. Then he got up and walked across to Margaret.

"See," he said slowly, marking his words with a queer, unfinished gesture, "listen to me. I've got a road to follow, I'm not going to be dragged out of it by you or any one."

She looked up with a smile. The ready jest died in her throat before the expression on his face. He hesitated, and then strode stiffly out of the room.

"What's wrong?" Margaret said uneasily.

"He thinks he's in love with you," I told her roughly. "You might have seen it long ago." Then, at the distress in her eyes, I added honestly—"It's not your fault, and it's not the fault of your being here. If you'd lived next door, or in Hammersmith, it would have been just the same. You or some one else. It need n't worry you."

CHAPTER V

OLIVER'S love was so oddly mixed up with his work and his poems that Margaret had the less trouble in ignoring it. I know, of course, that poets are supposed to spend their lives combining love and inspiration into a viscous fluid that somehow crystallizes out into poetry. This is called temperament, and viewed with a sidelong indulgence, as delicate minds view the necessity of manure.

I do not myself put much faith in this theory. It may hold good of those languid, sticky poems that ooze sentiment wherever you touch them. But I think that the real art is different. It has to work its way clean through the emotions and come out on the other side to spread its wings. Certainly this holds true of Oliver's art. His poems at this time were turgid, unwieldy things, slabs of voluptuous sentiment. They wore an ass's head and brayed in the sun. You would hardly recognize their kinship with the later poems, written when Margaret had become for him a kind of archetype, a silent, beautiful image, wrought of ivory and gold.

Margaret reckoned, with a faint ironic assurance, on Oliver's outlet in his poems. She passed over his moody angers, never disputed with him, and never made the mistake of trying to soothe him. Forced into a closer intimacy simply by her knowledge of the emotion which he threw round her, she dropped naturally into Anthony's methods of dealing with him. She adopted the same indifferent tolerance of Oliver's moods and tempers that had given Anthony such a hold on him.

I believe she did it instinctively: she had none of that feminine feeling for the "situation" that would have led her on from finesse to finesse until she was irrevocably entangled in an irksome affair. Her keen wits were no keener than her judgment of other folk and of herself. She was always sure of herself, and felt simply and clearly. Her emotions did not much color and con-

fuse things for her. It is not easy to put into words the quality of simplicity that her mind possessed. She thought along lines so simple and broad that her thoughts had an appearance of subtlety. And yet she was not subtle, but direct, and drew her serene self-confidence from some deep and tranquil source. Her mind advanced surely and boldly. It never occurred to us to think of her — "Ah, there was a woman's reasoning: you think as women do." Yet she could not possibly have been regarded as an echo or imitation of any one of us.

This suggests to me that the differences between the masculine and the feminine mind either do not follow the lines of sex, or have been vastly exaggerated. There was a pink-eyed youth in my own classes whose mind finicked with problems just as a woman's is supposed to do — does do, if feminine psychologists are to be taken at their face value. But Margaret thought as we did, and tackled problems as we did. There was nothing exceptionally brilliant about her intellect. She had rather the mind of a clever young man. She had taken a brilliant First at college but, as she said herself, largely because the "examination faculty," that curious mingling of imagination and a special kind of audacity, was developed in her to an abnormal degree. Ordinarily, her memory was given to awkward and unaccountable lapses. But let her mind be faced by a problem, and at once everything she had ever read, or heard, or thought, remotely connected with the point, rushed to her aid and fell into its proper order.

I did not intend to set out upon an examination of Margaret's intellect, but just to note that she never seemed to have a feminine mind: a mind, that is, lacking a certain amplitude of imagination and a certain unconscious confidence, a *feudal* confidence of power. Margaret had lived the first sixteen years of her life alone, and thereafter had men as friends and lived with men.

I suppose this made things easier for her with Oliver. He certainly did his best to develop a situation which would have been an irresistible temptation to many women. I could imagine myself the exploitation it would have undergone in skilful hands. Margaret walked unseeing through its every possibility. This first annoyed my touchy brother, and then drove him to open

rage. I think he simply could not understand Margaret's indifference. It seemed almost blasphemous to him. He began an unabashed dance of love, and at last staked his all on a "crowning mercy" of truly Puritan arrogance.

It was the first week of the summer vacation. Anthony had gone home, and we were packing to go north next day. Margaret, kneeling on the hearth rug, sorted books and arranged them in tea-chests. We paid what our landlady called retaining money for our rooms during the long summer vacation, but we knew that she would let them as soon as our backs were turned, and we did not care to have strangers pawing our books.

"What am I to do with Mick's books?" Margaret said suddenly. "Shall I pack them with yours, Joy, or put them in a separate box? He might send for them."

"How much room——?" I began.

"Put the damn things in the fire," Oliver interrupted, "and for pity's sake stop shuffling them about. I want to talk to you. It's the last chance I shall have for weeks. Can't you finish that in the morning?"

Margaret looked at him, and then got obediently to her feet. She seemed to have come to a decision.

"What do you want to talk about?" she said. Every chair was piled with books: she seated herself on the table.

I prepared to give Margaret my moral support in any argument. There was no argument. Oliver was too much in earnest and too unexpectedly wary for that.

"I don't know that I want to talk about anything," he said deliberately. "But there's some things I've got to tell you before I go. The first is this. When you were at college, you got yourself engaged. You were too young to know what you were doing, and you made a mistake. You can't deny it. I've watched you over his letters. Things you've said — oh, you did n't know yourself what you were saying: I'm not accusing you of whining or disloyalty."

"Thank you," Margaret said softly.

Oliver glared at her. "Don't fool," he said angrily. "Can't you see things are too serious for that?"

I stifled a desire to laugh. I felt that if I laughed, Margaret

would laugh too, and the scene would slip from comic melodrama into unpleasant farce.

"Perhaps you'd like me to go?" I turned towards the door.

"Don't go, Joy," Margaret murmured,

"You can go or stay as you please," Oliver said. "It's all one to me. What I've got to say to Margaret can be said anywhere." He swung himself off the arm of the chair and stood in front of her. "You know you've made a mistake. Very likely the man's a fool, an attractive fool."

Margaret flicked the ash off her cigarette. Her hand shook as she did it. She was coldly angry. The comedy began to taste bitter.

"Your judgment on a man you've never seen is well worth having," she said. Her voice softened. "Don't be a fool, Oliver. You're making a far worse mistake yourself than I am ever likely to make."

He tugged at his hair until it stood round his face like the fiery bush. "Be quiet, and listen to me," he shouted.

She smiled at him. "Very well," she said carelessly. "Go on: I'll listen. We might as well have it out now."

Oliver began to talk with an odd emphasis. As he talked, his eyes shone, and he seemed half mesmerized by the sound of his voice. He made a kind of song to love. Afterwards he turned it into a sonnet: the sonnet gained in concentration what it lost in humanity.

He was in desperate earnest. While I listened, the unconscious resentment I had been harboring against him stole to the brink of my mind and was lost in a half-anguished tenderness. I remembered him as a fat, sobbing child. I remembered the time he fell down the cliffs and I scrambled after him, frantic and dizzy, slipping down the sheer rocks and clutching at moss and trees. The tenderness swept out and encircled Margaret. I thought of her vaguely as very fair and pleasant. Oliver's love seemed an alien legend.

Oliver's voice rose and fell.

"You don't understand what I mean. You don't feel with me. I must try to make you feel. You must see the things I see, and then you will feel them as I do. One day I stood on the

school asphalt and looked down at the flowers in the valley gardens. The buds were opening on the trees, and the sky was clear, swept by the wind. The sea called up the valley. As I looked, I felt all at once light and diffuse. My brain was quite clear. There was nothing mystic about my sensations. Now, is there anything mystic about me?

"I felt that I had only to reach out a hand to touch the rim of the sea. I laid the tips of my fingers on the edge of the hill. I floated on the cold green waves. I brushed with my hair the stately white galleons of the sky. I was lifted up and scattered over the world. Oh, I was happy. I was happy like children and young lovers and puppies playing in the sun. All the sorrows of the world fell from me in shining drops as I rose, fell and were lost in the crying sea. I was youth before sorrow came upon men. I was in all things. I was the yellow crocus, brave between the dark spaces of the trees as a trumpet calling through the battle. I was the folded leaves in the pink, shining buds of the sycamores: I throbbed with secret life and pressed against the calyx to burst into the radiance of the world. I thrust up through the dark earth between the cool, whispering leaves of the daffodils. I was the sea: I flung myself against the circling cliffs; I ran with white foam of laughter along the untouched sand. I was the rush of the hill against the sky: trees sprang from my bosom and flowers gleamed in my valleys. I was the bounding arch of the sky: I stooped through space in a curve of ecstasy: the stars rode in me . . .

"That day I knew I should be great; I should say words the world would hear. I knew that men would do me honor. And that day there was born in me also a secret pain. It grew, and darkened at last the sea and the heavens, it sought out and chilled the smallest of the flowers. I never understood it. I strained against the bars that held me. I tried to find again that joy. But I could not. Not until now have I understood what held me back. It was desire. It is my desire for you. I might be all the world else, but not you. If you deny me, how can I ever be free again? You cannot deny me."

The room was filled with his pleading: it came from afar off and swept against the walls. We three stood in a place held

above time and the world. Below us passed the dead lovers, dry leaves scurrying before the wind, and those who lived, and scattered themselves in flowers along the road.

The red, level rays of the sun came through the window behind him. He was a Viking in shabby tweeds, inaureoled in his hair.

Margaret seemed to rouse herself from a long reverie. She sighed, and her voice was gentle.

"I don't love you," she said. "I admire you and honor you. You would be laying me under a great obligation if you would believe that I say this from my heart. I love you for what you do — but not you."

"Are you sure of that?" Oliver said incredulously. He stared at her as a man might stare over the edge of a dizzy gulf.

Margaret smiled. "Quite sure, dear old thing."

"I shall respect what you say, but you are making a great mistake," he told her solemnly.

Comedy returned to the world, shutting the fantastic doors behind her.

He did not go back on his word. From that day, he presented a stolid, friendly front to her criticisms. What inner strife and triumph that front may have masked, I do not pretend to guess. I do not doubt but he will marry, and rear a family. Neither do I think he will cease to wonder at the want of sensibility that deprived Margaret of so excellent a husband.

He no longer quarreled with her, and shut his love in some eerie of his mind.

CHAPTER VI

MICHAEL'S departure did more than disturb our domestic balance of power. It threw into high relief the dominating quality of Kersent's intellect.

Kersent was the most frigid of men. He seemed to have no affections except a rudimentary liking for Mick. He disliked his father, and hardly noticed that his mother existed. His unfailing courtesy and gentle voice were chill as winter sunlight. And he professed an unbounded love of Humanity. All the respect and admiration that he withheld from greedy, servile, struggling man, he poured out before a shining myth. Once remove the blighting weight of the capitalist, and the stunted growth would expand and flower in the sun. It would be full-blown and glorious on the instant. He cherished the dream in his frozen heart like a flame imprisoned in crystal. His mind refused obstinately to dwell on the perverted growth and useless blossomings that would precede the final flower.

He had the most acute mind I ever encountered. But he was beguiled by that ancient Deessa of philosophers—the perfectibility of man. Before you let loose your scorn, you instructed and clear-sighted ones, remember that Aristotle, yea, Aristotle the sane and golden, is fabled to have frisked on hands and knees with a lady on his back, at the bidding of a desired mistress.

It followed naturally from this dream of his, that Kersent should shrink from the fact of man's kinship with the perishing beasts. In a vague way he understood that the purely human standard he set up in his psychological work was unjust and narrow. But man's natural history repelled him. So did embryo man. The plates in my biology books turned him sick. He had an innate contempt for imperfect, struggling things. I believe that this was born in some queer way of his own fearful struggle against a maimed existence.

"You biologists are indecently curious," he said to me once.

"You upset the balance of power: you'd destroy our self-respect if we gave you half a chance."

"We'd correct it, you mean. You rest your respect and pride on a lot of things that seem to you finely human — your desire for a God, your mechanical skill, your moral inhibitions, all the rest of it — things that don't in the least belong solely to man."

"I don't," he interrupted.

"We are looking at the same thing from different sides. You're looking persistently forward: you find the developing stage repulsive. You want your mind to be very clean and orderly, with pamphlets laid neatly in rows under the white light of an unimpeachable and frigid love of humanity."

He denied this, but it was more than half true.

He felt in just the same way about the stages of national development. He refused to believe that there lingered on in modern nations echoes of tribal hates and jealousies. He thought that the capitalist explained every evil strain in national life. Sweep him away, and men would straightway fall into each other's arms in an ecstasy of brotherly love. The idea of strife was hateful to him. He sought to gloss it over in the tale of man's growth. He would have none of it in that fair ideal future.

"The old common rule was built on fear," he said, "but the men of modern nations do not fear or hate each other, though their rulers may try to persuade them that they do. Such treachery will never succeed again as it did in the past."

But of course, you cannot get rid of fear by pretending that it is not there.

CHAPTER VII

CHAMBERLAYN brought a message from his father. That preposterous aristocrat was playing with the idea of editing a new weekly paper and he wanted to talk to us. The paper — which had already a name and no body — was to express the soul of the worker in art. It was bred in the weary imaginations of two rich young men who had swung into fantasy as a relief from their fathers' bourgeois industry. I think they were intrigued by the idea of a ducal editor: the Duke himself was filled with divine madness and the soul of all the workers was born in him. Chamberlayn was very annoyed and looked to us to discourage his incredible father.

Margaret would not come. We were very late in reaching the Mayfair cottage, and dinner was ending confusedly in coffee and Benedictine. The Duke was excited and introduced us rapidly to his other guests. One of its youthful founders was explaining the purpose of "The Machine," and resented the interruption. We seated ourselves in corners. I found myself beside Jack Chamberlayn who was glowering at the company in mute disgust.

The rich young man struggled with a desire to make an oration. He kept rising from his chair and slipping back into it as he recaptured his first sweet faintness of speech. "I have been," said he, "in trams, and looking at the tired faces and worn, stained hands, wondered what dreams and ambitions strained behind those stolid masks. I have thought that we who know so much, we tolerant, audacious ones, might go — reverently — 'lights in hands; old music on our lips' — and open the world for those anxious eyes."

There was a sudden movement at the other side of the table and another young man got violently to his feet, tugging at the collar of his shabby tweed jacket. The Duke put a restraining hand on his shoulder and he collapsed unexpectedly. "He's a real worker," Jack murmured, "I wonder where they trapped him."

My memories of that dinner are vague. The room was warm and through a thick haze of smoke I caught sight of the real worker wiping vigorously round the inside of his collar.

A glass was broken, and on the polished table the fragments were tiny opalescent pools gleaming in the candle-light. The only light in the room came from the candles grouped in the center of the table, and the faces of the Duke's strange guests made narrow slits in the surrounding shadows.

An American poet emerged into the circle of light and read a poem of his own writing. He read it deliberately, and Oliver wrote it on the back of an envelope.

If you were a girder you would feel that which I do —
The iron throbbing of a new heart:
The heart of the new world,
The world that we have made.
It throbs as the Nasmyth hammer throbs,
In steel and granite it is forging a fresh creation.
God was an amateur: even his rocks are our playthings.
In our naked impulse we challenge malignant Nature.

Afterwards he made a long speech. He had all the naïve earnestness of the American. I felt worn out and sick of an effete civilization. He spoke of his flag, with a reverence that made us squirm. And he produced the Peace of God from its starry folds with a gesture charmingly complacent. His words rose over the flickering candles like little doves fluttering to rest. I heard them in fragments, infinitely soothing and warm. "A new fraternity . . . confused spontaneous outgrowth of sympathy . . . no more war . . . conference . . . council . . . arbitration boards."

The mask-like faces on either side of him, upturned to his earnestness, reflected it oddly. He flung out his arms. "The vast armies, the powerful military class, the allied interests of depredators the world over, will vanish with slow steps before the incoming tide of the brotherhood of man. Meekness will breed meekness, and through the silent suffering of injuries the world progresses to a universal friendliness."

The word "progress" stuck in my throat and I could not say Amen. While I sat staring at the American's round cheerful face it changed and became subtly rounder and looser and dis-

pleasing. He lifted his napkin to his lips and the illusion was complete. Erasmus Butterby grimaced in his place, wiping the overflow of repletion from his beard, as I had often seen him wipe it when he rose from the table at our school Speech Days, oozing benevolence.

Now, Erasmus Butterby's grandfather was of the belief that we progress inevitably towards the disappearance of evil. The parson told him so, and the scientist jogged his elbow on the other side and babbled—"Survival of the fittest: adaptation to environment," and other sayings that sounded very impressive to the earlier Erasmus Butterby. "If only those survive who are fit," thought he, "and only those survive who adapt themselves to their surroundings, then fitness and adaptability are the same thing. And since evil is certain to disappear in time, all is for the best in the best of all possible worlds; let the surroundings be what they will, the fittest men will survive them and good will triumph." And the parson wagged his head and the scientist his tongue.

So the Butterby ancestor went out and helped to create for a few million folk an environment that relegated Hell to the category of summer resorts and watering places. He crippled children in factories, tied half-naked women to carts in mines, and persuaded whole families of peasants to fill their bellies with the filth of the earth's produce. The folk who could survive that would be very fit indeed, he thought, and the triumph of good so much the more swift and certain. His excellent intentions were frustrated, but not before he had made smooth the way for Erasmus Butterby his grandson, to slaver imperially on our school platform, and build him a brick palace to house his lothly carcass on our very cliffs.

See what comes to a race that consents to adapt itself to any environment. Butterby spawn!

Anthony jabbed me vigorously with his elbow. The Duke was appealing for my opinion on "The Machine," and his son was whispering nervously, "For God's sake, Hearne." I tried to get rid of Erasmus Butterby.

"I hardly know what you want the paper to do," I said un-

happily. "Some one said Art and some one said Brotherly Love. It's no good singing 'Our hope is the hope of the world' in a dirty room to a vacuous audience. But there's desire behind all that messy sentiment. We are being pushed towards a society wide as the world and tolerant as the air that shrinks from no man."

A voice came wearily from the shadows—"Oh, shut up!" It was the real worker. I tried to see him, but two of the six candles had guttered out and his face was a mere hovering malice. I forgot "The Machine" in my eagerness to explain to him.

"Progress," I repeated vaguely, "we've progressed because each of us had at his service all the minds of all the other people he could understand. The more minds a man can touch and understand the further he gets. When we arrive at the limit of our capacity for this kind of sympathy we've arrived at the limit of human progress. We've got to choose now between our ancient instinct to sympathy and our old reasons for fear. Fear has had its biological day. It served us once, but we must escape from that prison-house."

The rich young man lost patience. "I think," he said suavely, "that we are forgetting the purpose of our meeting, which is the format of 'The Machine.' I have here a few sketches of my own that we propose giving to the world. They are expressive of the new spirit. As the poet said, 'In steel and granite it is forging a new creation.' It is the soul of the worker in art."

He unrolled a large sheet of paper. It bore a drawing in charcoal of a naked and horribly bulbous female. The young man in the shabby Norfolk pointed a fork at it. "Put it away," he said angrily. "It's not decent."

The artist flushed. "The bourgeois are rotten with morality," he said, "but I should not have imagined that the proletariat——"

"Proletariat nothing!" the other shouted, and "Hell to your imaginings . . .! Art . . .!"

He choked and rushed from the room. Oliver, who was near the door, rushed after him, and Anthony and I followed as quickly as we could get away.

There was no sign of Oliver outside, and we had been home an hour before he came. He had been walking about London with the angry young man.

"His name is Donnel. I asked him to come to-morrow night to see if there was any of your books he wanted. Seems he yearns after a treatise on Mezozoic jungles. Wonder what he thought 'The Machine' was going to do for him."

We lent him books, and that week I spent some hours helping him. The following week we found ourselves lending books and playing tutor to half a dozen of his friends. Our small room was unpleasantly crowded. We contemplated hiring an empty room somewhere and offering our priceless boon of education to the service of the new spirit. We thought that we could serve it at least as well as "The Machine." We were filled with a missionary impertinence and a passionate longing to help. We talked of our vague plans as the Scheme, and sat up o' nights to elaborate it. Before men can want better things, we said, they must know about them. In place of the rewards of heaven we would make them covet the rewards of earth. We would take them into a high place and show to the dispossessed heirs the power and glory of their heritage. As once before, the humanities should prepare the way for a new communion of man.

Kersent was full of doubts.

"The humanities are n't bred in slums," he said scornfully. "Nor understanding. What does my father understand except that he lives the life he was born to — the life of his kind? He says 'Such things are n't for the likes of we.' He is sure that I am climbing for a fall. Of course there are others, but not like him. Men who are discontented and aggressive. But they don't understand aught but the injustice done them. Most of them only want more for their bellies and their backs. A few want power, but even they will give you a poor sort of answer if you ask them — Power for what? Freedom for what?" He frowned.

"Suppose," I said, "when you were struggling on by yourself, you'd known of a group of young men who would have felt honored to help you and lend you books. Suppose you'd known of a room where they came every night to lecture and talk, would n't you have taken advantage of it?"

His hesitation was inexplicable. "I might ——" he said, and added — "If I'd been sure that you were n't trying to uplift me or get me. Under some damned social reform scheme."

"We should have to avoid giving that impression," I said. "You could help us there."

After a while he began to enter into our plans with a questioning enthusiasm. We had to get a room. We had to enlist the help of labor groups and societies. We had to go with care, lest we should be found trespassing on established preserves. Michael had been gone more than a year when we held our first meeting, class, whatever you like to call it: we shrank from defining it ourselves.

CHAPTER VIII

WHEN we began to look round for a room, Kersent said — “We ’d better go to see Dora and Tommy. If you can get their support, it may save you a deal of trouble.”

He took us to Dora and Tommy. They lived in Acton, in an amorphous street of small houses facing on to a forlorn field. Theodore Gurney was a slack-bodied youth with a frayed smile, and Tommy was his wife. “I ’ll not tell you anything about them,” Kersent had said. “You can judge them for yourself. They ’re college-bred — northern university. No: not yours, Margaret. One of the others. Always one of the others — according to which one you ’ve come from. He’s a fairly well-known organizer in the I.L.P., and it will be worth your while to interest him.”

We waited in a small sitting-room while Dora went upstairs to look for Tommy.

“She’s in bed,” he explained. “We were up awfully late last night. She writes most of her articles in bed. I expect you know her writing. She’s ‘Goldfinch’ in the ‘Beacon.’ Fine style, eh?”

He was gone before we had time to confess ignorance. We sat looking round the room. Books strewed the chairs and overflowed on to the floor. The hearth was littered with pans, and in one corner a tray of unwashed pots balanced itself on a hassock. A cupboard stood open on an indescribable medley of pots, books, groceries, scraps of food, and mixed garments. A large hat perched, leering, on a tin of fish. The room’s second door led to a small kitchen where the dirty pots and pans were thick as flies. Dust coated everything, even the typewriter standing on the table in a litter of papers. Dora had been typing when we came. We struggled with the temptation to look at his work.

A scrambling sound upstairs was evidently Tommy. A few

minutes later she came into the room, peering at us with large pale eyes. Wisps of hair hung round her colorless face. Kersent introduced us.

"Oh, how do you do?" she said carelessly. "You don't mind my untidiness, do you? I just rolled out of bed and threw something on when Dora said you were here."

We began to tell them our plans, feeling like peddlers at an inhospitable back door. Tommy fidgeted round the room. She kicked the cupboard door shut, and began to make tea, searching in both rooms for clean cups.

"Oh damn," she said, "they're all dirty. Dora, you're a filthy pig; you promised to wash up."

Margaret got up to help.

"Now for goodness' sake, don't think you ought to bother," Tommy said. "You'll only get grease on you. The place is disgustingly dirty. It's really Dora's week to clean up, and he's too beastly lazy."

Dora protested. "Well, you know you never cleaned up last week. You can't expect me to do all the mucky work."

Margaret walked into the kitchen. The door shut behind them. We discussed things with Dora, and at odd moments through the discussion I heard Tommy's high voice and fragments of her talk. Once she said—"This is no work for a trained mind, now is it? I say we were fools to take a house. But Dora would have one. He likes to have somewhere to ask his silly Labor people. He feeds 'em, and I'm supposed to clean up the mess. But not me. I say he's got to take his share."

And again—"Yes, I know all that, but it's a degrading job all the same. Why should I have to waste time doing work any untrained, brainless fool could do?"

Dora smiled at us in a deprecatory way. "She does n't really do much house-work," he murmured. "It's absurd to ask her to do it. If only we had more money. I'm rottenly paid. Don't ever tell me that Socialism is a paying game. And, of course, Tommy can't earn any money. She has the house to look after while I'm up at the Hall. She used to teach once, but it was monotonous work for a girl of her abilities. And you could n't get in the front door for dirt and muddle . . . Now, what exactly

is it you want? I'm awfully glad to see you. Kersent should have brought you before. It's very dull for Tommy all day, with no one to talk to. She can't make friends with the women round here. They think of nothing but their houses and babies. Besides, they don't approve of us. They think we're anarchists or something."

When the tea was made, Tommy carried in the tray and set it on the table. She brushed some of the papers on to the floor to make room for a loaf and a tin of protose.

"Help yourselves," she said, and thrust a knife at each of us. "Come on, draw up. Sorry there's no butter, but Dora forgot to bring any home yesterday. Have some protose: it's better than butter."

It was rather rank, but we tried it.

"You don't like it," she said. "More fools you. Have a cigarette, old girl?"

"You must n't mind Tommy's want of manners," Dora said proudly. "She calls every one fool, or old girl, or old man, before she's known 'em five minutes."

"If they don't like it, they can lump it," Tommy said calmly. "I can't stand your sniffy amateur aristocrats. I'm jolly hungry, I can tell you. I don't know whether Dora had any dinner, but he forgot to bring me any. I suppose you thought I could snooze empty, eh?"

"I did n't bother with dinner," her husband said. "This book has got to go back to-night, and I must get it summarized. You need n't grumble. As like as not, when I come home to-morrow you'll have forgotten to get anything ready."

He spoke with a rather ragged complacence. I caught the echo of an obscure resentment.

After tea, he made an effort to assert himself against Tommy's aggressive capture of the talk. He was an unabashed intellectual, very anxious to make it clear that he was of a different breed from your down-at heel fanatic. He had a wonderful library of Labor and anti-war publications. He showed us a pile of fat note-books filled with summaries of these books. He burrowed his way through the heavier kind of socialist literature, and threw up notes on every side, cross-referenced, and dotted with news-

paper cuttings . . . There was a bundle of cuttings labelled "The Goldfinch warbles."

He declared, and I daresay believed, that emotion had no place in his scheme of life. He told us, lest there should be any doubt of the icy ruthlessness of his intellect, that he would grieve for no dead soldier. "I would n't weep for my dearest friend if he'd been killed in a war."

"Don't think," he said eagerly, "that I'm on this job through any illusions about the nobility of mankind. I don't slave day in and day out for a lot of chicken-hearted skunks, but for an Idea. The human race is a disaster. Ideas are the only vital things."

"Half a minute," Tommy said, "while I get my book and put that down. It's not often you sparkle." She blew smoke rings at him, and propped one foot on the electric bell. "Damn thing does n't ring," she remarked. "Like everything else in this place. These houses are n't a year old yet, and they're dropping to bits while you watch."

"Oh, be quiet about the house," her husband said, "they can see what it's like without your telling them."

"All right, old boy. Talk on. Don't get roused. Tell them what a wonder you are. Kersent's heard it all before. He'll talk to me."

Kersent smiled absently, and crossed one leg over the other. She might have been gambolling round his feet.

Dora began to describe his I.L.P activities. He made great play with the stupidities of his colleagues, working-men.

"Good Lord," he said, "if you could fathom the abyss of bigotry, and the narrow-minded cowardice of them. It's enough to make a man give it all up, and go in for making money."

"Well, why don't you?" his wife interrupted airily. "You slave on all their damned committees and precious little thanks you get for it. Do you know," she said to Margaret, "I worked like a nigger — ask Dora if I did n't — and got up one of their socials, ordered food and organized the program, and never as much as a thank you. All taken for granted, as if you were born to be their bell-boy. It's not good enough."

As a matter of fact, I believe that both of them got considerable pleasure out of the endless intrigues that weave themselves round

the local I.L.P. branches. They sat up o' nights taking counsel how to get on to committees, and be mentioned in the "Beacon." Dora showed us his syllabus of lectures.

"I lecture to them twice a week," he said. "It wouldn't be worth it—it's an awful fag—except that one gets known through things like that. I shall be standing for the Executive before too long, I think."

He had dreams of the House. If he does not achieve at least that ideal and become a member of the permanent opposition, I shall be considerably surprised, for he is a born politician, with an innate aptitude for political scheming. To be sure, he talked largely of the brotherhood of man, and flapped his wings over the pettiness of Labor leaders. But I do not think that he will talk in the House of international brotherhood: for he has a keen sense of what is fitting and expedient. He talked of it to us because it was a necessary part of his mental stock-in-trade. It was the largest of the ideas he took over when it became clear to him that he was an intellectual with a mission. Of any imaginative conception of the phrase he had not a particle. It may be that he really believes it will be accomplished by successive triumphant resolutions passed in socialist conference. His political sense did not carry him beyond a view of politics as a continual wrangle in which the devil took the least cue. I could never make up my mind whether he really had brought himself to believe it possible to achieve a social revolution on the floor of the House, or whether that were only another of the attitudes he took up in the interests of his career: whether on this point he were more fool than knave.

Tommy interrupted him ruthlessly at short intervals. I guessed that her brain was a little above the average, but not within hailing distance of her ambition. She told him once that she was sick of his arrogance.

"You and your lectures," she said. "You seem to think they're bound to be good because you wrote them. Men are like that. I reckon I'm the intellectual equal of you or of any other man I know."

She came back once or twice to this matter of her intellectual equality. I daresay she had half-conscious doubts of it. We

soon found that she was always watching for slights, especially from the men she knew. She rated Dora like a vixen for disputing her authority in some matter of literary criticism. If she had reflected that men do not talk to each other of their intellectual equality, she would have refrained, for she was very anxious to be credited with a masculine outlook. To this end were her slangy speech and off-hand manners. There was no getting away from her determination to be a sport and a good fellow.

Dora took her interruptions placidly. Whatever inward distaste he felt for his comfortless house, he never allowed it to become articulate. He professed great pride in Tommy's cleverness.

"Of course," he said. "We're comrades. We don't pretend to be husband and wife. We only got married because this silly world puts all sort of obstacles in your way if you don't. I make no claim on her, nor she on me."

Oliver asked bluntly—"Which of you earns the money?"

"He does," Tommy said shrilly. "And don't I wish he'd stay at home and let me go out and earn it. Only there's no market for your brains if you're a woman. You're expected to wash pots and breed children and shut up. Not yours truly."

"Well, I suppose you claim your share of the money?"

Tommy stared. "Well, don't I need it to keep the house going? What do you think I am? A penny-in-the-slot meter? As it is, we've not enough money to do more than keep us alive. Nothing for theaters or magazines, or music or decent clothes. I'm absolutely cut off from things. I'm supposed to find all my interests and spiritual refreshment in him, of course."

Perhaps to keep her quiet, Dora got the "Beacon" and read us her latest warble. It was very smart and shrill. We protested our admiration, but I suppose we had not satisfied her, for as the front door closed behind us, I heard her say—"A bit sniffy, eh?"

We left with Dora's promise to arrange for a room in Hammer-smith.

"I can get you a good basement there," he said, "under the shop of our treasurer. He'll let you have it every night a week if you like, for something purely nominal. He's got a great idea of me, you see. The local temperance people had it, but he turned them out because they used to be singing when he was trying to

balance up his books, and it put him off. We'll come and help you. Tommy is a first-class lecturer."

We made our way to Shepherd's Bush, and climbed an east-bound 'bus.

"If that were my house," Oliver said, "I'd take a fire-shovel to that female but I'd make her keep it clean. What on earth does she do with herself? She does n't earn money, and she does n't work."

"Housework is a wearisome business unless you like it," Margaret said. "And that's a rotten life for educated people."

"Which is the educated?" Oliver retorted. "She's not, unless you mean that she's wetted the tips of her fingers in half the arts and a few of the sciences. But she does n't know anything. She imposes on that poor bruised reed by repeating his reflections in a derisive tone. And their home need n't be so sordid, and they need n't eat pressed grass. By God, I'd teach her a few things."

"A fire-shovel is an excellent text-book," Margaret scoffed.

"Some folk will learn off no other," he said, "and she's one of them."

"He should n't have married a girl like that," Kersent said. "She's no wife to him. In his way, he's a good man. I mean that he took a brilliant first in Physics. But, of course, he'll die of overstrain and indigestion before he's forty. It's silly to rave at her though," he added reflectively, "she's out of joint with the times. There's plenty of women like her—fit for nothing, happy in nothing. It's no good sneering or kicking at them. They're all products of the muddle. Very nearly helpless products, too."

There followed a series of interviews with I.L.P. officials and Trades Union secretaries. We found the latter rather tired, harassed men, quite willing to display our notices and talk about us. They did not, of course, guarantee the tenor of their report. We heard of one hefty Irishman who addressed his fellow-workers thus—"There's some bloody intellectuals taken a room in Hammersmith—you can read about it on the notice board—for the purpose of dispensing book-learning to the meek and humble. Mebbe some of you had better go and look them up, if it's only to show 'em that they don't know damn-all about everything."

The I.L.P. suspected us first of bad faith towards themselves, and then of deliberate benevolence. "You can't come the uplifting of the masses over us. We've got no use for college cranks. And your sort never did as much good as harm. What's a university ever done for a working man but turn him against his class and ruin him? For all we know, that may be your idea. Thank God, we're past being dazzled by your brassy educations."

Dora dropped a few remarks in our favor, but he was afraid of rousing the latent prejudice against his own college education. However, we got the room, and our obscurity disarmed any active prejudice. I remember only one man in whom indifference or contempt passed into real resentment. He was a gray-haired, withered little man, the secretary of a small branch.

"Why d'you want to go setting yourselves up for stinking missionaries?" he said. "Who asked you to offer to teach us? Who wanted you? Fine use we shall make o' your sort of learning. It would be better for you to come and learn of us. We'll teach you things you did n't know. Only maybe you don't want to soil your white hands."

"You'll teach me nothing of poverty," I said fiercely. "Nor what it is to go short and walk bare-foot. What do you think we are? We come of as hard-working stock as ever you did."

I stopped, ashamed of myself.

"If you are our sort," he retorted, "why are you coming round here, talking of knowledge and education and lending books? Lending books! Will ye lend books to me that slaves till I'm done, and starts at six the next morning? I suppose you think I'd just be enjoying a read of your books, with me eyes nicely rested by a day's work and me mind clear and bright with golf and good living? Pah! And if you must talk, what's to hinder ye from coming to an I.L.P. and talking there? Face us on our own ground. We'll listen to you. We'll ask you a question or two. Mebbe it's that you're afraid of? Anyhow, here's a platform. What's the matter with it?"

We explained humbly that it was easier for us to have a place of our own where we could store our books, and come every night.

"And why should you have things made easy for you?" he said resentfully.

CHAPTER IX

WE had decided upon a biological groundwork in our lectures. we would teach biology itself, and then history, psychology and sociology, all from the same view-point of man's ascent and his place in the scheme of nature. And then, building on that, we would reach the lesson that gave meaning to all the others, and show the possibility of a continued ascent. We would show it as not only possible but imperative that man should follow the path whereon his feet were set, the path of coöperation and mutual understanding. I was resolved not to let Kersent draw us into glossing over the story of human development.

But whether they fitted in or not, we were determined to get in classic and renaissance sculpture, painting, poetry, story-telling. Evening classes and associations were giving the everyday fare of knowledge. We wanted to offer the rare things, the beautiful things that are unnecessary because they have no money value, and supremely necessary because their value is beyond money. "We'll bring the old heady wine into a basement in Hammersmith," Oliver said.

"In cracked goblets," Kersent added.

But, of course, it did not work out in the least as we intended. From the very first, cracks opened between our plans and the manifest intentions of the men who should have been our docile listeners. They listened. They asked questions. They read our books, and wrote criticisms of them, but neither questions nor criticisms followed the expected course. Our plan got twisted out of all recognition. We pretended to revise it, saving our faces. We found ourselves giving an undue amount of time to biology, pure and simple, and neglecting history and sociology for the sake of literature and art. Margaret's twelve lectures on the Renaissance led to demands for more. She had to give another course on Florentine history, and another on Rome. In the end, hers were the only lectures left to us out of our intentions. Sun-

day night was given over to her: she stuck to what she called the strictly useless. The best liked lecture of all was also the most peculiarly literary. It was a description of fourteenth century Florence, with a queer inspired beauty for which we prophesied disaster: our snobbishness had its punishment in the triumph achieved.

We began in the January of 1913, and at the end of April were overflowing into three other rooms in the same street. During the first weeks, we had a shifting crowd of students, friends of Kersent, men from the local I.L.P. branches, men from Trades Unions, boys just left school, and old tired men. We had meant to attract boys and men who had been studying alone, and most of those who came to us did indeed come for help in subjects already familiar to them.

It was not long before the regular students emerged from the crowd. We started a formal enrolment. We charged threepence a month. Each man chose the subject in which he desired tuition — we stuck to the phraseology of the colleges — and pledged himself to attend on the evenings given up to that study. We set no limit: a man might enroll himself for every night a week. We lent books, and pestered our friends for cheap editions. Once we took up a subscription at King's, and gathered between ten and eleven pounds for the purchase of books, but we shrank from the notoriety involved in that method of getting money.

We started the idea of having one lecture a week given by a student. Men volunteered for this. They talked about the things they knew best, their work, their life, their views on education and politics. I have wished many times that some record had been kept of these lectures. Of all the things that we did and tried to do during that busy year and a half, I am proudest of the lectures we did not give but only called forth.

I cannot possibly tell the story of these months. They were very hard-working months. Oliver and Anthony were in their Final year, and the bulk of the work had to be done by Margaret and by me. Kersent was small use outside his own subject. Margaret worked up to the limit of her strength, but practically all the drudgery and hackwork of the thing fell upon me. I have gone a fortnight on less than two hours' sleep a night,

Inevitably, we had to get through days and weeks when our work seemed a useless waste of strength and time. We felt that we were making fools of ourselves, doing nothing in the least commensurate with the strain entailed. If we gave up, it would not make any difference in the inevitable march of events. We had even to meet and conquer the insidious fear that we might, after all, be setting ourselves up for "stinking missionaries." I can feel now the black depression against which we struggled, more than half due to bodily exhaustion and our lack of proper food and sleep.

Incidents and memories crowd back on me. For a short time we were afflicted by a group of young men from some college of London University, who came and made speeches under the pretense of asking questions. I remember Chamberlayn's lecture on the building of bridges. He was desperately nervous, and began to clear his throat. "Haw," he said, and shortly—"Haw." The audience first smiled and then laughed aloud. Chamberlayn was very angry. He thumped on the table.

"Do you want to hear about the things or don't you?" he shouted. "If any one here thinks he knows more about it than I do, let him come up and tell it: I'll be glad to listen."

They cheered him at that, and he began quite happily. I do not remember a lecture that was listened to in greater silence. He was full of his subject: his eyes shone with the romance that he imagined in it, and at the end, when he tried to give honor to the toiling obscure workers who wrought other men's ideas in the labor of their hands, he stumbled on an eloquence we would not have believed possible in him. I can see now the brown hands resting on the table, and the tall, lithe body bent forward in his eagerness.

I remember very little active unpleasantness, and what there was arose among people who came to us with mistaken notions about our work. For a few weeks a youth from Dora's own I.L.P. branch tried hard to drag our center of gravity into politics. He would get up at the end of a class in biology and ask bitterly what damned good was all this to a working-man. We tried patience and humility. We took him aside and explained as man

to man that he would not find in the whole register of students one who was not, in the narrowest sense of the words, a working-man, and that the classes were arranged to their requests. When our patience wore thin, we took to plain speaking.

"If they want your thimblerrigging Labor politics they know where to go for them," I said. "But they don't come here for that. They come here to learn about the things they can't learn anywhere else. We're not an auxiliary I.L.P."

"Any one can see that," he said scornfully. "The feeblest I.L.P. branch would n't waste its time on the useless rubbish you ask us to."

"We don't ask you," I retorted. "You came of your own accord, and you can go as soon as you like. The useless rubbish is what the rest of the men want. Why the devil should you set yourself up to tell them what they want? And for what must they always keep their noses glued to the useful? That's what makes the difference between you and the rich fortunate ones. They have the sense to know the value of the useless things, as well as their beauty. You don't even understand the things you are pleased to call the useful. How should you, always up to your neck in them?" I was irritated and irritable from overwork, and I found it hard to keep on this side a decent show of resentment. "You know Dawson, the docker?" I said, struggling for self-control. "Of course you do, he's a member of your own branch. Well, he and Forbes — Forbes is at the docks too — came to me last week and asked if they could be lent books on Egypt. I thought they meant Bernard Shaw and the Denshawai incident, but it turned out that they meant Ancient Egypt, the Pharaohs and the Pyramids. They're deep in Moret and Wallis Budge at this minute."

"More fools they," said he. He had what is called horse sense.

He had read Marx, and believed in the Marxian infallibility as earnestly as ever a Catholic in the Pope's. He was full of schemes for getting himself on to Divisional Councils and the like queer bodies, and keeping other people off. He kept bringing me little pamphlets to read, until I got to loathe the sight of their cheap grayish paper and close print. I lost my temper altogether.

"Damn it, man," I shouted, "do you think I have nothing to do but suck up your filthy, concentrated — pap? Take 'em away. I have n't time. I have n't patience."

My head ached and my eyes burned. He smiled at me with round malicious eyes. All the angles of his undergrown little body expressed delight in my annoyance. The blood rushed to my head: I wanted, insanely, to jump upon his face in heavy boots.

"You don't care really for the interests of the working-classes," he said.

"Well then, I don't," I answered. "If it means coming out in a perfect eruption of irritating tracts, I don't. I don't care a damn what happens to you and your kind. Now go away. For goodness' sake go away."

He went, perfectly satisfied at having penetrated to my treachery.

Of course, I was ashamed and horror-stricken afterwards. I could not account to myself for the amazing irritability that possessed me during these days. I would have sought out the little man and begged his pardon, if that would have been anything but a self-indulgence. He had had such a mean, cramped life. What could I have been about to sneer at his pamphlets? I might as honorably have sneered at a cripple's crutch.

"I have let loose on him the resentment I ought to have kept for the men who made him what he is," I cried. "The pot-bellied, club-reared fools who don't even read pamphlets, whose brains are lower than his, because they're not even trying to reach out. I behaved to him as they would have done. He has every right to look down on me. I'm not so good a man as he is."

"Joy," Margaret said gravely, "you'll come a real break-down one of these days if you don't give yourself a rest. You know you're talking the most utter rubbish. There's no question of looking down on any one. The man was in the wrong all the time. He wanted us to be quite different from the people he found us. He had to be sent away."

"Am I a fool, Margaret?"

"An incorrigible fool," she said softly. She stopped, and the color flamed in her cheeks. We looked at each other so for a

minute. Something stirred in my mind, stirred and left me half-aware . . .

Then there were the two Christians. They wrote to us before coming to Hammersmith. "Dear friends— We have heard of your work, and feel that it has been laid upon us to help you. We do not know what you require, but what you ask, that will we do. We believe that your work has no religious bias. We are simply Christians."

No doubt they believed themselves to be just that. But how they hated Christ!

They had to conceal it from themselves by glossing over all the incidents in His life that revolted them. They must have had some dreadful moments. I caught a glimpse once of the hidden conflict. The man was talking to Kersent, and I sat behind them, reading over essays.

"My dear friend," he urged softly, "you cannot think that the rubbing of the ears of corn was meant to justify sabbath breaking. It was merely symbolic. It was directed against the papish practice of fasts. His eye foresaw the Romish heresy. Man must eat, even on the Lord's day. Our Lord condemned the devilish practice of the Babylonian whore."

He was convinced that Jesus could not have been other than a sound temperance man. The marriage feast at Cana annoyed him. He seemed to feel, firstly, that the water had not been turned into wine, but into some herbal effusion; and secondly, that it had, on the whole, been rather silly of Jesus.

I looked up as he was talking to Kersent, and for a brief moment saw in his eyes a gleam that was certainly not the light of reverence. It was more like resentment and a dull, aching dislike. There was so much in Christ of which he could not approve. He wrestled with Him in secret, abused and argued with Him. Outwardly nothing appeared but an over-warm, simmering love: doubtless he was conscious of nothing else.

At times he wallowed in religious emotion. "I have given myself to Christ," he told us, with an ungainly wriggle of his body. He was ecstatic as other men are drunk, and with much the same intellectual enfeeblement. There is no more hopeless bigot than the emotional one.

His wife was altogether harder and brighter. She was conscientious to the point at which conscience becomes a vice to be indulged at the expense of the community. She ran one of those houses where erring women are punished by the charity of the more wary or more fortunate. She had always a scared, cringing girl with her as her maid, a brand plucked from the burning and quenched viciously. Christ simply had not a chance with her. She would have made short work of His sentimentalizing over strumpets and sinners. She despised Him in her heart, but he made a good jack-o'-lantern to frighten the timid, so she had Him truss up His points and come down like a flail on the ungodly.

"She hath the itch," Kersent said, "the moral itch." She had indeed a selection of tales that in a different dress would have shocked a smoke-room. Nothing vicious missed her glance. The poets were degraded: Shakespeare should have been burned by the common hangman. The Rokeby Venus deserved its slashing for its indecency.

The woman soon left us, but the man clung to us like a bur. We could not use him as a tutor, and it was simply ridiculous to regard him as a student. He sat at the back of the room, and afterwards came to us with urgent deprecatory whispers. He insisted upon telling us all about his private life. God forbid that I should accuse the pair of ungodly lusts. They were united in the most delicate and refined tie. But if ever I met unrestrained, ravening wickedness of the flesh it was in that man's vicarious caresses. He talked about his wife and their holy partnership as mystics tell of the Divine Bridegroom, or starving men reflect on roast sucking pig.

We had at last to tell him that as he was not a working-man, we could not enroll him with the other students. After that, he haunted us reproachfully in Herne Hill, poking his lean face round the door with a gentle—"Do I intrude?"

He did—most damnably. He affected with Margaret an exaggerated impressive manner. I believe he regarded her presence in our rooms with a delightful horror. He came there to rub his hands over it in secret. After a while, he ceased to intrude, and we did not see either of them for several months.

We had great trouble with an odd anarchist named Darley.

It was not personal trouble, for he was a charming old creature with a passion for first editions. But he had a thunderous voice, and burst upon our classes with furious orations on the need for personal liberty. There was not a single thing that he did not bring back to this question of liberty. He had once written a poem. It began: —

“Oh, Liberty, thy wings are molting now,
Thy feathers strew the lofty Caucasus.”

This he read aloud several times, without any provocation, on the ground, I suppose, that he was at liberty to do so. We got rid of him at last, but not before he had called Kersent a black-hearted caterpillar, smearing and sliming the most precious things of the spirit with his vile communistic leanings.

I have met many anarchists but never one who doubted but liberty meant that a man may make himself any kind of an aggressive nuisance so long as he do it in the service of an Ideal. How is it, I wonder, that an Ideal has so often such a scurvy, loud-voiced, domineering train of servants?

We lost the help of Dora and Tommy in less than four months. Tommy lectured for us once or twice on German literature. She had, we found, a quite considerable ability to heap up an untidy mass of facts, but not the least grasp of their significance or power to coördinate them. And yet she was, even at that time, attaining a reputation in the outskirts of journalism. Nowadays you can hardly pick up a newspaper or magazine of a certain type without finding in it one of her thin, irritating articles, running like venomous little spiders over half the topics of the day. I cannot account for it, except on the supposition that a mediocre intellect may make a good show if it is employed in an unusual or unpopular cause.

We differed with them first over the philosophic basis of our work. Dora was as reverent of Reason as an eighteenth century poetaster, and he got very acrimonious when I refused to give up my biology classes for classes in the political economy of the I.L.P.

Then later, both Dora and Tommy were seriously annoyed because we would not allow them to turn their work for us to

their advantage. They wanted to talk about themselves in connection with it. We were not only dead set against any such advertising of our schemes, but determined that they should not potter round a little, pretending to work for us, and then go away to boast about it. I told them at last quite frankly what I thought about their intentions.

"If you will help us, we shall be most uncommonly grateful," I said, "for we're sadly in need of help. We're over-taxed. But you must understand that we can't let you talk about what you do here. We're not running that sort of thing at all."

Tommy flung herself back in a chair, and kicked her high heels on the ground. I tried not to notice that the front of her dress was covered with spots of grease and gaping at the waist. Dora must have had a hot dinner that day.

"Oho," she said, "we're the modest violet, are we? Well, it's not good enough for me. No good works in secret for your humble. I've seen too much of the world for that. There's precious little credit going about in this life for any one, but what little I earn, I intend to have. I might as well tell you that straight out. I'm not one to beat about the bush, whatever else I may be."

Her husband was not so frank. He regarded us gravely. "If it's help you want," he said, "you simply must talk about yourselves, or let others talk about you."

"It's not that sort of help we want," I explained.

He had the air of a man who is determined not to be fooled. He suspected us of some subtle duplicity.

"Well, I don't understand what you do want," he said slowly. "You're not trying on any good-by-stealth game, are you?"

He puzzled over us.

After our final break with them, Tommy wrote an allusive attack upon us in the "Beacon." We were referred to sarcastically as the gray brethren who work by night. It was suggested that we were working cunningly to an end, doubtless political. All this work of ours was a preliminary to vote-catching. The comrades were warned not to be taken in by our crude methods. It was a most acrid article, but we were by this time well enough established in our little way to be proof against such things.

As time went on, we became gradually a kind of bureau. We

drew up courses of study for men, and told them what books to read. We hunted up information in newspaper files or original documents at the British Museum. We never refused help however trivial the subject. We made a rule that men might, without enrolling themselves, come to two lectures or classes, as friends of a regular student. In that way, we were approached several times by men who had for years been studying some subject and wanted help on a particular point. Often they came full of suspicion, prepared to stand on their dignity as experts. I like to think that in every instance we disarmed them by our pleasure in talking to them, and our eagerness to be of use. Sometimes we captured them for our Saturday evening classes.

Our work divided itself, roughly, into three departments. There were the men who came, wanting nothing more than to hear about things, strange things, new things, anything unconnected with their routine life. They were too tired to try any independent study.

We left this side of the work to Margaret. She not only lectured herself, but went boldly to demand lectures from experts. She used to go with burning cheeks and limbs shaking with nervousness. She never met with but one refusal. But she suffered such agonies in apprehension of a rebuff that we begged her to let one of us go in her place. Always she shook her head.

"I have a better chance of success than you. It's what's called underhand influence of sex."

She made a grimace, and smiled at us, and went off in all her slim, trembling courage to ask a man with half the alphabet after his name to come to an obscure room in Hammersmith, and tell work-worn men the tale of his adventures in a South American forest. Or it might be a Dante scholar, or an English-speaking Russian revolutionist.

Then there were the men and boys who wanted real tuition. We were always trying to work this side of our work up to university standards. This was not, of course, easy to do. We had to supplement our classes by private tutoring to special students.

Then came the bureau side of our work. This grew larger and larger, overflowing into all the other sides. We enlisted the help of a few King's men, but the strain became almost unbearable.

We had so far limited our classes only by the space in our use. We began to think of cutting down the numbers. Then we thought of taking a larger place altogether and asking Margaret's uncle for funds to arrange things in a way that would relieve us of a little of the work.

And yet, you know, for all we worked day and night, even beyond our strength, to fit our own studies with our voluntary task, we accomplished so pitifully little. At the very most we had eighty or a hundred regular students on our roll, and I suppose that in the whole eighteen months before we had to give things up, we reached and helped not more than three hundred men. Three hundred!

And all the time I, at least, was struggling against an undefined dissatisfaction. The smallness of our achievement made the effort seem ludicrous. We were painfully conscious of its latent absurdity. We spoke of our work, when we had to speak of it at all, in an off-hand, allusive fashion. And then we were ashamed of that too, and reproached ourselves for belittling the men who were so anxious to learn that they would learn in a basement of a handful of students.

We tried to steer a middle way between an affectation of indifference — "just an amusement of ours, you know, so original" — and a detestable boastfulness. We worked furtively, afraid alike of ridicule and unmerited praise.

I know now that my dissatisfaction rose from the unrealized knowledge that there was work nearer my hand. Any man, with the scholarship and the wish, could do the work we tried to do, but not many could reach the independent dalesfolk whose power for good or evil in the coming change is neither reckoned nor understood.

We learned a good deal more than we taught in Hammersmith. At some things we could only guess.

I believe that there exists in the intellect of the working class a vigor and freshness that may well bring forth a new Renaissance. For generations crushed under the industrial slavery, I believe that it will move when it does move, with a mighty bound. Reflect that it has no academic shackles to burst. No spectacled generations tread it down. The world is new to it — a world as

full of blossom and fresh stir of life as ever set men's feet wandering in unknown lands, and their throats swelling with the songs of a world at Spring. A world crying out for a new mind to understand it, a new heart to fashion it. We saw that mind rousing itself from long sleep in the men who came to us during those feverish days. We saw, in glimpses, an intellect that will make short work of classic and modern controversies, and all such efforts of a worn-out mind, trying nervously to make things as easy for itself as possible. The awakening giant will take these things in his stride. Yes: we learned much.

And since we did not go into that work for the sake of saving our own dirty little souls, how should we be able to reckon anything that we did then to our credit?

Days and nights pass behind my eyes, from the days when we shivered and froze in the unwarmed cellar to the days when we could not get a breath of air between its four dark walls.

I step out of the underground station at Hammersmith into the vortex of converging streets. Margaret, rather white and drooping in her thin frock, hurries beside me across the road. We reach the house and pass behind the shop to the basement staircase. Oliver and Kersent have gone further up the street to the rooms where the less advanced students are already at work. We stand at the foot of the stairs, and a man touches me on the shoulder.

"I'm so glad you've come in good time," he said. "There's something been worrying me for three days in this variability of species business. I wanted to see you about it before the others came."

I begin rather nervously to tackle the question. Young Donnel has something approaching a biological genius, and I am afraid of not being able to teach him properly. He was, I remember now, in my own battalion when we first went out. I lost sight of him afterwards. He may be dead, the questioning brain still and trodden into the earth.

Sometimes, when our work was over for the night, Margaret and I found our way down to the river. It would be cool then.

The buildings behind us blotted out the glare and rush of Hammersmith. Just below our feet the river went darkly to the sea.

We wished to follow it. At how many little boats and flat barges should we not have tugged in our swift hurrying! Past the decent, stately Government buildings, past the furtive sleepers on the seats, past the ends of narrow streets still echoing and flurried with the tread of the day's feet, past empty hives of trading houses, past the barns and storing-houses of the world, past docks where the great ships waited in the darkness beside wooden quays, past gray flats of mud and scattered houses with one bright eye winking across sad fields to the heedless river, past all the stress of little lives, all the restless pressure of little brains throbbing with schemes that have walled the river with stone and scarred it with keels and bridges, past them all to the waiting sea. We were two specks of life, caught between sky and sea, caught and forgotten with our futile longings. We cried out in secret for the quiet roads, and the hollows of the hills, and the sweet breath of the northwest wind.

During those warm, stifling days in the early summer of 1913, when we were just beginning to feel the real burden of the work we had undertaken, my personal life was tangling itself into a sore perplexity. Between the two, I must often have gone nearer madness than any decent biologist should.

CHAPTER X

ON an afternoon in late Spring, Margaret and I went to Kew. Oliver would not come with us, but I was tired out under the strain of our double work. I felt that I must get away from it, if only for an afternoon. We walked slowly across the gardens and reached a narrow path between tall trees. Sitting in the warm green light, we talked, and then forgot to talk. Margaret lay back with half-closed eyes. Abruptly, there were shouts and a curious muffled clatter. A huge young cart horse, come from God knows where, appeared at the top of the path and tore down upon us. I leaped to my feet and dragged Margaret out of the way with hardly an inch between her and death or horrible injury. The mad creature turned at the end of the path, and swung across the open grass. It was crazy with fear. I believe it lamed itself in the end, and had to be shot.

I forgot it on the instant. I held Margaret in my arms, soothing her, kissing her, calling on her like a fool to answer me . . .

Followed days of harassed uncertainties. Margaret avoided me. I worked myself up into a querulous rage. I wanted to have things settled, to know where we stood. I could not get a word with her. At last I hit upon the absurd plan of writing a letter. "If you won't give me a chance to speak to you, I'll make a scene before the rest," I wrote. "I must talk to you. This is absurd." I went out and posted the letter with a sense of having been very decisive and resourceful. I watched her across the breakfast table as she read it. She moved her head restlessly, as if shaking off a burden. I was full of remorse and a sense of my blundering.

We entered upon days and days of inconsequent discussion. We lost all sense of humor and behaved like psychological novelists. For a while I held to my purpose. I wanted Margaret. I did not see that any scruple could be strong enough to separate us if she cared at all. I reproached her.

"You're spoiling my life and yours for the sake of a promise, a convention. Would Keith want you if he knew?"

"There is no reason why he should know," she said. "You don't understand. It's not the promise. It's the things I feel. I should n't be happy. I'm as much bound to him as if we were — married. I've been his. I am his. I can't just walk away and leave it all behind — repudiate it — pretend I'm free as I was before . . ."

"You are free. You know you are free."

"I don't feel free. Try and understand. I can't just begin again with Keith unhappy and — betrayed. I'm not made like that."

Sometimes I would not let her speak. I shouted at her. I took her in my arms and pleaded with her. She hardened, and then broke into a pitiful appeal. I would not try to understand her.

"You are a coward," I said hardly. "You're bound and scared by a stupid tradition. You can neither think nor act for yourself." I turned and left her.

How am I to tell of the coming and going of our love? We wrangled like bitter enemies, and clung to each other in a passion of tenderness and terrified longing.

There were times when we were content just to be together, seeing each other every day, sharing thoughts and plans and enthusiasms.

For weeks I beat on the queer hardness I had discovered in her. With a vague memory of the best traditions, I spent one night walking about the empty streets in a stupor of rage and unhappiness. Somewhere in Kingsway I almost fell over a woman crouched sleeping in a doorway. I stopped and put what money I had on the skirt between her sunk knees. My own grief seemed part of the incredible misery of a world awry. Nothing fitted: everywhere were great cracks and chasms between the smooth seeming and the sick reality. Vast stone buildings braving the stars, and at the foot of the steps a huddled woman, spoiled, broken and utterly undone. I shouted absurdly at the skies. Half-remembered words came to me — "Some dim, mysterious laughter, from the blind, tongueless wardens of the dead." I said

them over as I walked, and stopped to cry—"Margaret," and began again, and came again to her name. She held herself from me. I should not be able to take her if she came to me and said—"Take me now: I can't bear it." I fought with puny madness against the inert forces that thrust down through the centuries to keep us apart. I felt suddenly that I snatched my love from vile hands, snatched and held it aloft.

God knows I was wretched enough, but I think that I had an unconscious satisfaction in the completeness of my misery. Tragedy may in sober truth be joyful for youth: for old age, it is only pitiful and to be endured.

I was stumbling over the short grass in Hyde Park when the madness dropped from me, and I heard, blown strangely by the wind across green spaces, the broken, quivering cry of wakening birds. I lay down under the distant light of dawn and slept.

I abandoned my unbearable attempt to browbeat Margaret. I loved her. I wanted to understand her. We had always understood each other. I went to her, determined to be very patient and kind.

"Show me why you can't tell Keith the truth and come to me," I said. "I won't try any more to force you to my way of thinking. But I must understand. I want you to be free."

"My own deeds bound me," she said somberly, "but I can't free myself."

"Margaret," I began, resentment pricking me again.

"No, don't argue with me," she pleaded. "Listen instead. I'm right. I know I'm right. It might be easy, it might be right for another woman to do as you wish me to do—to tell Keith I love you—and just leave him. It would be wrong for me: I feel that it would be wrong." She pressed her hands against her breast. "There's something in me—you call it fear of tradition and convention—I don't think it's that. It can't be that. Why should that tradition of all others bind me? Perhaps I was born a sort of Puritan. There's a fierce, a terrible revolt in me against turning from one man to another. That sort of thing can't be done unless it's done as the easiest thing—almost unconcernedly. I could n't do it unconcernedly. I can't think of it unconcernedly. It would be false thinking for me. I should

be false to myself, sinning against myself. Oh, why don't you see? I'm made like this. How can I help it? I can't be what you want me to be, not without a pretense that would be fatal. It would turn our love bitter. I couldn't bear it. . . ." She held out her hands to me. "Oh, Joy, Joy," she cried, "Joy, my beloved—I love you too well to lie to myself. Oh, my dear——"

I stood unresponsive, struggling with the last remnants of my labored and ridiculous superiority.

"You wouldn't have me pretend happiness and ease?" she cried. "It would be useless—wrong."

"Yes," I said at last. My voice sounded queerly. "I know what you mean. I've felt it too . . ."

A forlorn sense of defeat came to me. I crossed the room and stood beside her, resting my face against her hair . . .

CHAPTER XI

A WEEK later I met Margaret's lover for the first time. He came through London in June on his way to Southampton, and stayed one night with us. He had an American uncle to meet, I think. His wire came while we were at breakfast. Margaret frowned and hesitated over it.

"I suppose he can have Mick's old room?" she asked diffidently.

It is curious that I have never been able to regard Keith Ainslie as altogether real. I cannot now recall his face, nor the tone of his voice, though both were pleasant. I suppose he was real enough to Margaret, but even after she married him, he lived in my thoughts with far less of significance or palpable reality than did the impalpable barrier that divided us.

During the whole of the evening that he stayed with us, I had a queer sense of detachment. I sat in my chair smoking; I answered questions, and was very lifelike. But nothing that was said made the least impression on me. Can you imagine a world from which all color has been withdrawn, where the forms of things are dimly indicated, shadows in a prevailing shadow? Things had a colorless, empty aspect for me that night. The flames of the fire burned without light. The voices of the speakers trailed off into thin spirals that eddied through the room and passed into dim and dimmer circles as wide as the earth. I kept jerking myself back to reality, and seizing on a word which I took back with me into the outer darkness.

I believe that Keith had come prepared to dislike us. He was very agreeable and talked easily of many things, but a curious defensive attitude lurked behind his words. It showed itself at odd times. Oliver got out of hand early in the evening, and at last became outrageous. Keith treated him with polite amusement until his patience gave way. Then he said coolly—"Well, of course, I know you're all godalmighties in the universities. I was a student myself a year ago. You will grow out of it."

Oliver stammered. "Don't try to come the man of the world over us. You're a fool now: you were probably more of a fool at college."

Margaret looked at me, but it was Anthony who answered her mute entreaty.

"I'll apologize for Oliver," he said smoothly. "He'll not apologize for himself. He cultivates all the external attributes of genius with great care, and among others the proverbial lack of sense and manners. You might otherwise miss the genius."

Oliver took himself out of the house, and Keith fell back on his smiling hostility.

I left the next morning before the others came down to breakfast. My lectures were over at eleven, and I took myself to the Museum Reading Room. There I arranged books round me in a defensive disorder, and set myself to think.

At first I could think of nothing but the senseless position into which I had drifted. I tried to trace the steps that had led me into it. I wanted to see where I had gone wrong, what I could have done to avert disaster. I was haunted by a feeling that there must have been some decisive moment. I had overlooked it, or bungled it. I had failed to say the right things. I had been blind, or stupid, or absurdly baffled . . .

An attendant brought a book and laid it at my elbow. I turned mechanically to thank him. Margaret was standing irresolute behind my chair. I suppose she had been to Waterloo with Keith. She looked tired. Her eyes sought mine in a silent unhappiness. I stared at her for a minute, and then pushed back my chair.

"Come along," I whispered. "Let's go and look at old Amen Hetep. You like looking at him."

CHAPTER XII

JULY found us at the end of our tether. Margaret and I had intended to stay in town and carry on the classes, but we saw that it was impossible. As we jolted through Walworth Road, waves of hot foetid air rolled against the 'bus, turning us sick and faint.

"You could n't stand many summers of this," I said to Margaret.

"I sha'n't have to," she answered coolly. "I shall be married and living outside London next July."

Margaret had a habit of such queerly insensitive remarks.

"You'll at least have air and fields there," I said shortly.

"Yes, but what fields! They have no character. Smooth, smiling, stupid school-girls of fields. When I think of fields, I see a wide rough slope running from loose stone wall to broken fence. The gorse bushes are creeping across, and hillocks of brown reedy grass break the green monotony. A field that remembers the ordered feet of legions, and the wild cries of sea rovers bringing fire and death."

That evening we decided to go away together for a week. I suggested the idea, and urged it on Margaret.

"One week out of a lifetime," I said. "Oh, we'll keep all the rules of the road, never fear. Let's pretend for a week that we've been shot into another star, where there is neither marrying nor giving in marriage, nor Walworth Roads, nor any other fretting thing. Let's get into some old, wide-skied Utopia where men do not have bad dreams."

We went to the sea-coast village a mile from Margaret's old home. Margaret stayed with a huge-armed, red-haired woman, her foster mother, who bestowed upon her a much warmer affection than she had for her ten lusty sons and daughters, the common stuff of her life. I slept in the attic bedroom of a fisherman's cottage, and we spent our days on the cliffs and the shore.

It was a good play. The young sun shone on a young world. We climbed the narrow, cobbled streets between the cliff-fast houses, and followed the valley inland until the river narrowed to a beck and was lost along the slope of the gorge. Summer comes late to the North, no flaunting, assured beauty, but a shy bride, stepping delicately down the dales between the moors, over dark green of primrose leaves and under the virginal green of the young birch trees. The yellow gorse is her rude courier, and the tardy rose swings from the tangled hedges.

On one hot afternoon we wandered over the flat rocks below the eastern cliffs. The tide had turned to come in, but Margaret led me confidently away from the town. Slipping on the rocks, we came round the corner into a desolate bay. From the stark shore, a black ridge of rock thrust out to sea. A narrow channel, bare and dry beneath the sun, lay between its sharp slope and the cliff. Margaret took off her shoes and scrambled up the ridge. Small stones rattled down on to the rocks below. She stood for a moment and then ran with swift, perilous footsteps to the farther end. Here the narrow ridge broadened out in a platform whose sides ran steeply to the sea. At one side a mass of rocks made a slippery stairway. I followed her slowly. Already, the narrow pools between the flat rocks were filling stealthily. Feathery algæ and pink anemones lifted and floated in their green depths.

I lay down beside her. The heat of the sun-warmed rock struck through our thin clothes. I drowsed, watching the tide.

"Are you sure this is safe?" I asked lazily.

A thread of water lay between our couch and the cliffs, widening as I looked at it.

"Safe as can be," she told me. "The foot of the cliffs will be deep in water two hours before the full. But this ridge of rock is safe enough. Only the Spring tides sweep over it. Don't I know! I used to come here every day the long summers through. The sea slipped round me, and there I was on an island, like all the Crusoes that ever were."

We talked in sleepy voices. Margaret lay face downwards, her chin resting on her folded hands.

"It is queer that I should be here with you," she said. "I

have been so often alone. I used to sit trying to explain the world to myself. I made me a city of dreams: you went in by one gate in the shining, untroubled morning, and left by the other in the mysterious night. It had gardens and tawny gleaming hills. Sometimes its walls were linked creatures of flame, singing together for joy; and sometimes marble, many-hued marble, barred and tipped with gold. I carefully threw outside the city walls all the things I could n't understand and all the things that seemed to contradict each other. I played with children who looked up to me. I was as brave as I was beautiful." She laughed. "Oh, you could n't fathom my conceit."

"Poor little lonely conceited ghost," I said softly.

I put an arm round her, and drew her to me. Her body lay warm against mine. I heard nothing but the lift of the waves against the rock, and saw only her face, cool and fair between her loosened hair. The cliffs behind us might be the mountains of the moon and Utopia be indeed beyond them, its white roads waiting the pressure of our feet. It did not matter then.

"Things got mixed. The walls faded. The contradictions grew and defied me. I began to dream of getting away into the world beyond the scarped hills. I thought I could come back later and tidy up the city in the light of wider knowledge. But, of course, the gates don't open to me now. Some other child has the key."

She drew herself out of my arms, and sat looking out to sea. A chill wind ruffled the tops of the waves. The color was gone from the water, and clouds hid the sun. I shivered and stood up.

"There'll be a storm," Margaret said.

"We'd better go. We could just get through to the foot of the cliff."

She hesitated.

"No," she said. "Let's stay. There's no danger."

The sky darkened, and a spirit woke in the sea, maddening the waves. From the gathering darkness, they swept down upon us. We stared at a green wall, laced with spume. It shivered into spray that drenched and blinded us. Swirling and screaming, it was sucked down and back, wrenching itself from the rock with a hollow, deafening thunder. The wind stung us. Margaret

swayed and almost fell. We lay down and pressed ourselves against the platform of the rock.

"We can't get away now," Margaret said.

I nodded. We should have been crazy to attempt it. If we had not been blown off the narrow part of the ridge we had been battered to death in the raging cross-currents of the little ghaat.

We waited. The waves broke against the rock, and thin streaks of foam ran across it to pour themselves over the lower edge. Margaret lifted her head and smiled at me. I thought that we should be swept into the sea. If there had been anything that we could do, I could have done it coolly enough. But there was nothing to be done. With defenses down, we abandoned ourselves to the universal madness.

I held Margaret in my arms in an exultant ecstasy. I kissed her cold face. I pushed back her hair and kissed her eyes that laughed into mine. Through her soaked dress, I felt the rounded body. I loved as the gods love that know neither urgency of desire nor satiety.

"Heart of mine, body of mine, I love you," I said. She could not hear me, but her lips moved in answer. We lay beneath the darkened arch of the sky while the solid universe split and crashed round us. The wind dropped, I felt the prick of rain between the showers of spray. Our kisses were salt and sharp with the sharpness of imminent parting. "Only a little while," I whispered, "a little while, dear love of mine, and we shall be free."

Anti-climax dogs mortal men. We were neither drowned nor free. The rain stopped. The clouds slunk behind the rim of the sea, and the sun shone over the thrusting waters. Margaret laughed a little unsteadily.

"Did we die?" she said.

"Not quite."

After a while she sat up and shook out her hair. Stooping, she drew my head against her knee. "I should not have minded death like that. Would you?" she said.

"I don't know."

Apathy and an unreasoning resentment pressed on me. I did not touch the hand that rested on my shoulder.

"Most people are afraid of death when it comes to the point," I said roughly. "I never knew one who was not, except my father, and he play-acted with death until it took him unaware and he had not time to realize that it was real. He died well in spite of himself."

"That's a hard thing to say."

"It's a true one. If he'd had time to realize things, I daresay he'd have died cringing and protesting. And yet I don't know. He had queer ideas. He believed that all life was a matter of bargains. Once you made a compact with life or your fellow men, you had to keep it, or else submit yourself to be broken by the destiny you had flouted and outraged. Man could not, with impunity—he said—break any contract that his mind and soul had once assented to. The penalty was death in life."

"He had got hold of something," Margaret said slowly.

"Maybe so," I answered indifferently. "If he had, it was the only thing he ever held surely in all his incompetent life."

She moved a little.

"You talk sometimes as if people—even your own people—were somehow impersonal, had nothing to do with you. I don't understand you then. There is something in you I can't touch." She frowned. "A man should not detach himself from men and judge them."

"I don't," I said. "What is there that you can't touch? Except just the reserve that we all must have. Every self should have its virgin fortress. It's only decent so. Moreover, it's inevitable. There must be barriers." I struggled to explain something that was in my mind. It refused to deliver itself up. "People are somehow not real to me," I said. "Not always real, I mean. I get a sense that it is all play-acting. Even we who love. People recede into an infinite distance. I can't feel them. I am unreal—and you. Nothing is real but the barriers."

"Just now," Margaret said in a low voice, "were they there—the barriers? Was I unreal to you?"

I sat up and looked at her. Her face was hidden by her hair.

"No, they weren't." I trampled on my doubts. "There were no barriers." I laid my head against her arm.

She bent her face to mine, and I shut my eyes before the radiance of hers.

The waves lifted tawny heads to the passing sun. Still we stayed on the rock, while the waters sank slowly between us and the cliffs . . .

I kissed her hair and her face, pale below mine in the darkness.

A wind slipped over the edge of the world. The red gold of the hidden sun lay across the waters and trembled between the drifting clouds. Heavy shadows came over the eastern cliffs, following each other down the dusk. The first shadow reached the edge of the sea and swept the hesitant light. Sea and sky leaped together, and we watched until the universe strode back and nothing was visible save the thin white verge of the waves and the blackest mass of cliffs behind us.

We walked along the ridge and stood looking into the gleaming shadows of the little ghaut. Then, gathering up her dress, Margaret slipped down into the water: it rose above her knees. We splashed out and ran along the foot of the cliffs to the broken upward path, stumbling as we went through pools of shimmering light . . .

I am amazed at the ease with which we forgot that a week was not a lifetime. I suppose that by all the rules of loving, it should have been one long parting. But we never thought of the parting. We were perfectly happy and perfectly careless. Perhaps unconsciously we did not believe in its reality. On the night of the last day I was suddenly convinced that it could not be real. It was absurd to think that Margaret intended to marry another man, and that I was tamely acquiescing in the folly.

We had started after tea for the moors. It was late when we reached the narrow lane that climbed up from the valley to the moor edge. We stumbled over loose stones, and caught our feet in the brambles that stretched out from the hedges. The thin scent of the honeysuckle fled before us through the darkness. The warm night pressed on us. I lifted a branch from Margaret's way, and a shower of cool drops fell on my hair. The wild roses slipped past like ghosts of flowers that had swooned in the

heavy air. We splashed into a little stream that ran across the road.

At the top of the lane I swung open the wide gate and we walked over the marshy ground. Reeds, and young bracken, and then the heather. We disturbed peewits. They rose, wheeling and screaming away from us. On the slope of the first rise we sat down. The sky sprang away on either side. A faint luminous light, infinitely remote, hung above the hill where the languid crescent moon lay on her back.

I sat very still. Margaret drew me down so that I rested in her arms, but after a while I could not endure it.

"Don't you see now that you can't do this thing? You can't make me give you up. You dare n't."

"Ah," she said, "don't. Don't spoil it, Joy. It was to be our week. Don't go letting in reality now."

"This is reality," I said. "The other was madness — wickedness. How can you —?" My voice rose. "How can you go to another man — you that have lain in my arms these days?"

I had an unhappy sense that I was making my protest as of duty bound. I must protest for my pride's sake.

Margaret took my hand in hers. She spoke quickly.

"See. I love you as I never knew it possible to love. I would give the rest of my life to cut out the past years — to be free. I would give it gladly. If you will now, you can force me to say that I cannot let you go. I should cry out and cling to you. And to-morrow I should break my word to you — and go back to the other."

"And what if you can't bear it, Margaret? What if you find the other — intolerable?"

"I *can* bear it," she said quickly. "You don't understand me. Don't think I sha'n't regret. I shall regret and suffer. I shall want you. I shall want to die. But I shall neither die nor come to you. There is something stolid in me — something deep down and stolid as a rock. I can bear anything."

"Why should you bear it? Why set yourself to bear grief and parting?"

"I can bear those things," she repeated. "But I could n't bear the other kind of regret. The sense of — of betrayal and

weakness. A light woman, taking one love and then another. The idea offends me as an ugly picture might. It's nothing to do with the moral rubbish. It's just that I feel able to bear the one misery but not the other. Ah, you don't understand. I don't understand. I only feel. And there is pity, my pity for Keith."

She turned to me with a little cry. I would not look at her.

"Do you remember the end of that story of Tolstoy's," I said slowly, "where he repeats that the sin is in the eyes? Whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her . . ."

Her face burned.

"Have n't we sinned?" I went on harshly. "What does it matter that we've stopped short of technical adultery? In your thoughts have n't you been just what you say you cannot be? It's the spirit that matters. You're exalting the body above the spirit . . ."

She stumbled over her words. "No — it is not so. To say that the sin is in the eyes is — an overstrained sentiment. It's not so. It does matter that the body is withheld. It matters everything. Body is personality as much as is spirit. And I can control my body. A wanton spirit is harder to control, but it need n't mean a wanton body —"

She broke off with a short, distressed laugh. "What is the use of talking ethics, Joy? This has nothing to do with ethics. It is a matter of feeling. What I feel another may not — and feeling is the guide. I do what I must. This is our week. Let us have it. Afterwards — when I am married — dignity, if nothing else, will keep us apart. We cannot be forever — clutching at each other round corners. Just for this week we are free to love — as much as we may. After all," she smiled wryly, "if Keith could be consulted, he would assuredly prefer a faithless spirit in a faithful body to complete and irrevocable betrayal."

And while I felt still that I should make a scene and call upon the indignant heavens to witness her folly, I knew the futility of protestation. I had come to something in Margaret that I could neither move nor alter. I might for a while carry her with me, but as surely as ever I knew anything, I knew that I could not keep her. I should have to let her go.

"After all, a bargain's a bargain," she whispered. I saw her quick smile.

I put my head down on her knees, and let the anguish sweep over me.

We did not go home that night, but slept in the shelter of an old quarry. Margaret slept in my arms. I woke and stared at the paling sky through the sparse branches of a mountain ash. "My sweet," I whispered. "My wife." She woke with my lips on hers. In that moment we knew the bitterness of death.

Early in September we gave that preposterous Eikonoklast dinner. A week later, Margaret and Keith Ainslie were married. Keith had come up to London to manage in an aeroplane factory that his firm had just built. He and Margaret went to live at Purley. Margaret came every day to the Reading Room and the Hammersmith classes. Sometimes she came to Herne Hill, and worked with Oliver and Anthony, but only when she knew I should not be there. We avoided each other. In some indefinable way her marriage had destroyed our self-confidence. We distrusted ourselves and our capacity to take up the old, careless intimacy.



BOOK III
CHAOS

CHAPTER I

THE autumn of 1913 brought more changes in our household than Margaret's marriage. I had my scholarship extended for a further year, and Oliver bowed his proud spirit to teach English and the lower kind of classics in a Dulwich school. He got on with the work better than I expected, managing somehow to keep it in a compartment of his brain that could be barred and bolted every day at five o'clock. It may have been bad pedagogy but it was sound sense in an age when pedagogy is no profession for a decent man. Anthony's plans went all awry. He did not get the expected post in an agricultural college in spite of recommendations from three professors. The post went to the needy relative of a Bradford millowner whose endowments were worth a good deal more to the college than professional protestations. James Calvert wrote a bitterly playful letter offering him work on the farm. Before Anthony could compose a refusal to his liking Keith Ainslie invited him to come into the aeroplane factory. His uncle had, he said, given him something of a free hand in the choice of departmental managers. He urged Anthony to accept the offer. "We could train you as a tester of machines," he said: "if you care for that sort of thing. We are all beginning, you see. Now is the time to come into these things." Anthony had no hesitation. He accepted, and sent a jubilant letter home.

"The old man could never resist success," he said. "You see: he'll begin to assure my mother that I'm not so bad as he feared."

Alas for youthful charity. The letter his father returned began—"Can it be possible that of your own free will you have entered upon the most fatal of occupations? Where was your conscience, where the training of your devoted mother, when you elected to fling away all the years of an expensive education to enroll yourself with the fools and evil livers who pursue such

dangerous careers? Believe me, there is neither honesty, worth, nor money in the life you have chosen. I should be glad if you would return to me the gladstone bag I loaned you. If a merciful God permits you to live long enough to rue your follies I shall be glad to let you have it again. Meanwhile, prepare to meet thy God — Your loving father, J. Calvert."

To this letter Anthony made no reply. Three months later a scrawl from his brother David sent him flying north. His father was dying, and his mother, to punish Anthony's undutiful silence, had determined to withhold all news until her husband was dead and buried. A week later Anthony returned. He said nothing of his journey until Oliver asked awkwardly — "How is your father?" Anthony seemed to rouse himself from a dull dream. "The old man? Oh, he's off."

"Off?" I repeated. "Off where?"

"Dead."

It was several days later when he told us that his father had refused to see him. "He would not set eyes on me unless I promised to give up the work at the factory. So I never saw him." He added — "There's something about the old people that there isn't about us. Something hard and stable, I mean. Something we're none the better for losing. I can't imagine David, for instance, or myself, running that farm as my father has run it for sixty years, in good years and bad, extending it and bettering it every year. For it's a hard farm — with the moor hanging about all the upper fields. I suppose I shall have to go back to it — but not yet — I can't go yet."

Anthony went oftener than any of us to the house at Purley. He stayed on in Herne Hill and bought a motor-cycle to take him to his work. Keith Ainslie liked him rather more than he disliked the rest of us. His smooth manners deceived Keith: they deceived other people who did not live with Anthony. Keith believed him to be free of the conceit that raged in the Hearne clan: he clung rather pathetically to the idea that among all Margaret's unhappy choice of friends, Anthony, the only reputable one, was also the one who appreciated Margaret's husband.

Oliver and I went down to Purley for odd week-ends. It

came upon me with something of shock that Keith was painfully jealous of Oliver. The boy allowed his dislike of Keith to be so childishly clear that an older man would have laughed at it. Keith did not laugh. He quarreled with Oliver: he even came to Herne Hill with no apparent purpose but to continue their senseless disputes. Mutual jealousy drove them into each other's company. Keith was given to fits of irritability and at these times his hatred of Oliver obsessed him. He would sit for an hour staring at Margaret and Oliver with eyes devoid of expression. Up to the very last, Margaret did not seem to realize the depth of this feeling. She ignored his ill-temper, and never guessed at the suspicions that inflamed it. I remember an incident that might have warned her. It occurred during the performance at some theater or other where she and Oliver spent the time between the acts on the syllabus of her Sunday lectures. During the long interval Keith got up sullenly to make a telephone call and I followed, with a vague idea of lightening his gloom. Coming back, he stopped abruptly in the aisle. My eyes followed the glance of his. Oliver's arm was flung along the back of Margaret's seat as they bent together over their scraps of paper. He looked up, saw us staring at him, and stooped his head to Margaret's with a half-deliberate air of possession. Keith sat throughout the rest of the evening in a speechless rage. His wife passed over his discourtesies as if he had been a fretful child. I had a moment of sympathy for him.

The moment recurred at odd times during the next few months. I do not believe that Keith had many days of untroubled happiness in his marriage. He must have come to loathe the sight of us. He was sensitive enough to feel the want of sympathy between himself and Margaret, and we were associated in his mind with everything that he blamed for the subtle difference in her. He burned to take her away from us, away from all memory of her Herne Hill life. If he could do that, she would be his again as in the first days of their love. He resented her absorption in our work at Hammersmith. It made it necessary for her to see us every day. And since he could not accuse her of neglecting him — Margaret too plainly put him and his comfort before every other interest — he fell to ridiculing the Scheme. He accused

us of intellectual slumming. The accusation may or may not have been true, but it was made in bad faith.

I gave up going to Purley and kept Oliver away as much as possible.

And yet Keith Ainslie made his own unhappiness. I do verily believe that if he had not added jealousy to a naturally moody disposition, he would have made a success of his marriage: so ready is mortal man to accept the second best. Margaret loved him with a tenderness that had no part in her love for me. She bore with his moods and cared for him unwearyingly. If she had guessed at his jealousy I think she would have thrown Oliver overboard without the least compunction. To save Keith pain became something of a passion with her.

He had, indeed, an appealing charm. I felt it myself. I do not mean the phrase to imply the least suggestion of weakness. He had practical skill and a genius for management. He made friends easily and kept them. I do not think he was very easy to live with: he had his full share of the obstinate suspicious temper that is often the underside of a sensitive personality. He could love his wife and suspect her good faith at the same time and with the same fervor. This alliance of emotions seems to hold an essential place in every decent and sanctified home: and few of the sanctified decencies had been omitted in the training of Keith Ainslie.

Margaret's upbringing had ill-fitted her to cope with them. An orthodox home life might have taught her to recognize their presence in Keith's moody tempers. The very tenderness that she lavished on him aggravated his fears. He felt, I think, that she would not be so tender if she were not conscious of having taken from him her early passionate love. He was just fine enough to regret its loss and not so fine that he could take with an honest faith what she could honestly give.

Margaret would have been happy enough in her marriage. I suppose she had her moments of wretchedness and longing. I know that she had. We were left alone one day in our sitting-room at Herne Hill. She stood looking out of the window for a minute or two. Then turning abruptly, she made a step towards me. "Joy," she whispered. "Joy." Her voice was hardly

audible and she put her hand to her throat as if the word hurt her. The blood sang in my head. We looked at each other. I should have had her in my arms. The smell of the moors struck across my senses with the sharpness of a blow. It tore at my heart. I held out my arms. Abruptly she evaded me, and the door shut behind her.

Oh, we suffered. No doubt but that something had gone out of our lives, something fine and to be desired. And yet the heart of our lives was not gone, and in our sane moments we knew that. We had left to us the most precious things, work, youth, and friendship. Men have wrecked their lives for a lesser love than ours. And yet we could never, outside brief intolerable moments, doubt that, losing each other, we had still the noblest part of our heritage. I do not know why this should be so. It was not so because our love was a little thing.

Friendship is an emotion finer and sweeter than the greatest love in fable and romance. I did not console myself with this reflection. Consolation would have been futile sometimes and the rest of the time unnecessary. But I knew it to be true.

The queer fact of woman's hopeless tendency to mix up sex and friendship, or friendship and her domineering instinct, must be taken into account when we consider the growing freedom of intercourse between men and women. If you are to teach that liberty is good, good as means or end; if you are to have women sharing in every activity of life, you must face the certainty of tremendous changes in the whole view-point on sex relations. You have, indeed, one aspect of the change already in the outcrop of agglutinous philosophies of free love and matriarchal revivalism.

It is, after all, not so easy to slough off the puritan reverence for words that can make our bowels turn to water at the mere flourish of phrases about chastity and license. And yet it must be done, if we are ever to be free men again in a commonwealth of real things. If an enforced chastity is no chastity at all, neither is a spineless indulgence of every stray desire to be swollen by the title of license. License, after all, implies an exercise of will, even if it be an ill will.

No doubt of the coming change, And since the world cannot

be pushed back either to a joyous paganism, or to a joyless purity fostered and shaped by the cat o' nine tails, it must even go on its way.

Where does the way lead? Perhaps you are assured that it goes straight to hell, and you try to waft it back with much fluttering of lawn sleeves and petitions against divorce. Inasmuch as you are doing what you must, I can only wonder and smile a respectful smile. But if you have not an assurance of your unlimited right and ability to interfere in men's lives and the striving of their minds, if you are only a perplexed mortal with no assurance of a divine ordinance to be infallibly impertinent, you will have at least a show of patience with my uncertainties.

I think it almost certain that in the immediate future, feeling will be taken more and more for guide in the conflicts that arise between wish and tradition. The arbitrary inhibitions have no longer a secure hold on minds. On those minds, I mean, that are not partakers in the divine infallibility. Common men like ourselves go looking within to our own half-realized desires for understanding and assurance. The old dogs of "shalt not" are no longer to be whistled up. The striving mind goes fumbling and groping past them for less blind guides of conduct.

Ho, infallible ones, a word in your ear.

How if you were to drop the cat o' nine tails and set out with the searching mind? Its first steps into freedom will be dangerous, may easily be fatal.

I feel that somewhere in this question of the friendships of men and women lies the clue that will unravel a good many bewilderingments. And I feel also that the possibility of such friendship is rooted in a subtler and bolder self-knowledge. We go astray because of confused and unrecognized desires. We desire one thing and in our fumbling ignorance achieve another, and wonder at our dissatisfaction and unrest. It looks, on the face of it, as if Margaret and I had made the usual failure of our friendship. And yet I believe I have an answer to that if I could but get it into words. Margaret had at least two other close friends among the men we knew, bound to her by a long untroubled intimacy. She had a capacity for friendship that seemed to spring from the double root of her intellectual self-confidence

and her single-mindedness. She neither mothered nor intrigued men. For the matter of that she certainly did not "mother" or make love to me. We found it quite possible — nay, quite natural and easy — to maintain a serene friendship alongside our passionate love. It was the love and never the friendship that took on the appearance of an episode, an accidental, obtrusive thing.

I cannot explain why it should be so. I only know that it is.

My mind returns again and again to this, as if it were the significant thing. Is it possible that the future will explain it and be explained through it? We may, I mean, leave behind us the fierce possessive hunger that consumed Keith Ainslie's happiness and wrecked his life. The whole romantic structure of passionate love may come in our eyes to take up a position of subsidiary importance. I believe that it is indeed subsidiary. Only we cannot see it undistorted because it is mixed up with so many other things that we passionately desire — beauty, adventure, companionship, sympathy.

We have to get things sorted into their places.

Much that is confused will be clear, much that is inaccessible must be accessible, before that which a man wishes is at the same time his and the world's surest guide.

In the meantime, is it conceivable that the race will wait on the flutterings of the infallible or stand still until freedom is taught in continuation classes?

CHAPTER II

EARLY in the following year I had a letter from Mick. He wrote from an island in the Danish West Indies where he was putting in a month's holiday with a man he had met in St. Vincent. He sang his host's praises with the fervor of two months' acquaintanceship.

"Mayo's a fine fellow. You'd take him to your heart. He is the son of an Englishman, and his father had him sent to Edinburgh. His mother died off before she'd had time to get fat and horrible: all these native beauties get fat. So Mayo's father kept a kind of romantic affection for her. When he went back home and married, he did n't forget Mayo, who by the way, looks more English than I do. He left him half his cotton land, and Mayo's one of the most successful planters hereabouts. He keeps ten dogs, a gramophone with a magnificent collection of 'cello records, and a cook who is also his mistress. I don't know anything about her other qualifications, but she's a real cook. Mayo knows more about modern European literature than we know about English. Also he has a lovely wit. The society — what there is of society — round here is hierarchical down to its toe nails, and the ladies look a bit askance at Mayo. The Danish Governor, a half-educated old wine-vat, is very fond of him, except when his wife has been telling him he ought to have more respect for the imperishable glories of civilization than to hobnob with half-castes born in sin. Then he joggles up his languishing ideals, forgets all about his stray sixty-six children, and squints round his nose at Mayo. Mayo just waits until the poor old fool has to come sneaking round for help with his correspondence, and then he makes him listen to a long tale of Britain's glorious supremacy before he'll lift a finger for him. The Governor hates Britain: he squirms and gobbles and gets congested about the gills. Yesterday he rashly remarked that the English language was corrupted Danish: that is actually what these daft oits

here believe. Mayo turned his back and said nothing. The Governor, to mollify him, began talking about Shakespeare, what a great dramatist he was and his poetry and so on. 'Poor devil,' said Mayo, 'he had to write in corrupt Danish.'

Much of the letter was filled with Mick's thanksgiving that he was out of England.

"I shall never come back. I should suffocate or take to strangling parish councilors for fun. That's what England is — a distended parish council. You've got no sense of proportion. You can't see that the future of England is already settled — doesn't matter. The countries that matter are Eastern Asia — expanding into Siberia — Australia, and America. The Pacific and not the Atlantic matters now."

I had written him that I saw nothing at the end of my second year of research but an assistant mastership in some public school. Mick was relentlessly opposed to such a dead-alive life. He argued about it. "You've a lot of brain, but whether you'll land on your feet as the servant of any one else I doubt. Like all our family you have a rasping tongue, and how you'll get on with any headmaster God only knows. Look here, give up this fooling round in London and come abroad. I am willing to go anywhere you like. Think about it, Joy. I know what I'm saying. There's plenty to do out here when you know your way about. Why, Mayo would take us in with him — if only to have a little decent society. But I'll do anything you like if you'll only come."

I put the letter aside. The more I thought of it, the more attracted was I by the notion. No doubt I should have fallen in with it. I did, indeed, warn my mother that I might go. And I told Margaret, for the poor pleasure of seeing her eyes darken and her mouth twist.

I was at home when Mick's letter came. And while I sat reading it on the windy cliffs, chance in London had already prepared the first of a tale of happenings that, before ever the war scattered the poor last of them, had made an end of nearly all my plans.

Oliver and Anthony had stayed in town through the Christmas vacation. We were expecting them to spend its last week with

us. The Saturday when they should have come passed without them, and on Monday night Oliver came alone. Anthony had hurried to the farm with his brother's warning letter in his pocket.

Oliver was shortly explanatory. Margaret, he said, had stayed the past week in Herne Hill. She and Kersent were drawing up our next term's syllabus for all the classes except those in biology. Keith, called hurriedly to Scotland, had agreed that it would be easier for her to stay in London for a few days and work without interruption. With reluctance he agreed also that she might as well give herself the pleasure of staying with her friends.

"Pretend you're a free sprite if you must," he said. "If that's the sort of life you like."

So she came one Monday and on the following Saturday morning made her farewells to Oliver and Anthony over an early breakfast. She was going back to Purley that afternoon and there were still things to be settled. Ten minutes after she left the house the post brought the news of James Calvert's illness. Anthony hurried away to catch the morning train north.

Oliver hated to have his plans upset. If things failed to happen as he expected he shut himself up in a sullen lethargy and did nothing at all. After Anthony had gone he idled about the house until it was too late to reach King's Cross for the afternoon train. He decided to travel by the night mail. In the evening a whim took him to the Elephant and Castle Theater. There he sat for the better part of an hour, reveling in low and rustic emotions, until it was borne in upon him that he could not bear to leave London. He was very tired: he left the theater before the hero had fully recovered from his first-act downfall and returning to Herne Hill, went straight to bed. Margaret walked into the house an hour later. She and Kersent had worked on until late in the evening. It was not too late for Margaret to go down to Purley, but she shrank from arriving at that time of the night in an empty, fireless house. She had sent the servants away for a week's holiday and neither of them would be back until Monday. She made her way to Herne Hill therefore. To May Rutherford, daughter of the house, she apologized for presenting herself without warning and at such

an hour. "I'm afraid you'll be annoyed with me," she said. "Just when you thought you'd got rid of the lot of us." The girl looked at her and seemed about to speak. She said nothing, however, and went up to bed, leaving Margaret in the chilly sitting-room. Margaret read in a haphazard way until after midnight and then herself went softly upstairs.

In the morning she breakfasted alone. An hour later Oliver opened the door and stood staring at her.

"Margaret!"

"Why, I thought you'd gone north."

Oliver began explanations. May appeared in the doorway and Margaret turned to her. "You never told me Mr. Hearne was still here."

The girl laughed and spoke amazingly. "There's none so deaf as those that won't hear," she said, and vanished into the kitchen. The other two looked at each other.

"Touch of the sun," Oliver suggested.

"In January?"

Margaret puzzled over the incident for a few minutes and then forgot it. After lunch she went down to Purley. Oliver left Herne Hill with her. He intended to travel at night, but in the end spent the night wandering round London and did not go north until the following morning.

The queer episode of May Rutherford stuck in my mind long after Oliver's casual recital. "What do you suppose she meant?" I asked him.

"Oh, I don't know," he said indifferently. "Don't suppose she meant anything. She always was rather insane."

"She's had a grudge against Margaret ever-since that night."

Oliver stared. "What do you mean, a grudge? What has Margaret to do with the wench and her adventures?"

"I did n't think of it until this minute," I said vaguely.

My mind had suddenly flung new light across a piece of ancient history. I imagined that I had always seen it thus. As a matter of fact, the thing had never come into my mind in just that way before. I went back to an evening in the winter before Mick left England. We were sitting round the fire after dinner. The rain rattled on the windows and bubbled up between the sashes.

Anthony at the piano made wonderful minor poetry of Debussy. A loud wailing came from the back of the house. We listened with an uneasy annoyance. The wailing ended in quite unnatural screams. Mick danced with nervousness: he stood first on one leg and then the other. "We ought to interfere," he said. "Should we interfere, do you think?"

Before we could decide on so nice a point the door was violently opened, and our landlady stood on the threshold. The screams must have been hers. She tore at the neck of her dress and clutched her hair. We had never suspected her of Shakespearian tendencies. Mick, who had been just inside the door, staggered back. She took no notice of him and the scene passed rapidly through farce to rank lunacy. Somehow we were all in the kitchen. Whether she took us by the hair and dragged us there I do not now remember. I do remember the small room and the circle of lamplight on the middle of the table. A young man stood in the shadows by the fireplace. Rain was pouring off the rim of his hat and his clothes were soaked. He was thin and sallow: he shivered and stared sullenly at us. An untidy clothesheap on the floor moved and was Mrs. Rutherford's daughter. May waited on us. She was a plump, unwholesome damsel with a fathomless appetite for low tales. She left a trail of lurid-backed books all over the house: they were pushed under mattresses and fell unexpectedly out of boot cupboards. She haunted our bedrooms at dusk with a duster and the worst intentions. Finally she neglected us.

Mrs. Rutherford was soaring untrammelled in an ecstasy of adjectives. We gathered incredulously that we were called in judgment on the soaked young man. He had stolen her one ewe lamb: he had defied the world and mocked at God: he had seduced May, and now was showing a wanton reluctance to feeding, housing, and clothing her for the rest of her life. We were public opinion, thrust incontinent in his downcast face.

We tried wretchedly to escape. I had the utmost sympathy for the young man. I heard Anthony murmuring, "You know, really, Mrs. Rutherford, what can we do? I mean, it's a family matter, is n't it?" Margaret edged quietly towards the door. Somehow we got ourselves out of the room, leaving Mick in-

volved with Mrs. Rutherford in an incredible discussion of eugenics. It raged for an hour while the youthful seducer grew more and more sullen and finally fled past our door, uttering dishonorable accusations. "There, but for the grace of God . . ." Anthony began softly.

I suppose the two women had worked up the scene between them. I do not know how matters arranged themselves. May was not married. She lived on at home, growing more and more lethargic, and read the novels of Mr. Bennett to develop her intellect. We forgot the fantastic scene in the kitchen. As I thought of it now I was reminded of the look on May Rutherford's face when Margaret slipped out of the room. It had been malevolent. At the time I had hardly given it a second's thought. It presented itself to me now as the most livid incident in the whole preposterous scene. I tried to fit it in with the girl's senseless insolence. "There's none so deaf as those . . ." I decided at last that her mishaps had cracked her brain.

CHAPTER III

THROUGHOUT the early months of 1914 our classes went merrily on. Kersent gave less and less help. At last he could do nothing for us. He was working through his second year as a research student. He worked all day and half the night. When at odd times he came to our rooms for an hour's rest, he could neither talk nor listen. He sat in his chair and stared in front of him with a desperate expectant look in his eyes. He hated music. When Anthony played he got up and went away. "Play on your damned piano if you like it," he said, "but keep your fingers off me. I'm not a keyboard." Once Anthony persuaded him to stay and then began a series of queer discords. Kersent was transformed. He screamed and shook his fists at Anthony. "You make me mad," he shouted. "I can't bear it: you make me mad."

Afterwards he apologized in his half-mocking, half-diffident way. "God help me," he said. "I must have been a bear on a chain and danced to a fiddle in my last incarnation. I do so loathe the noises men make. Music! Shall I tell you what music is? You've tied a tin can on to your emotions and persuaded yourself that its antics amuse you."

We could not get him to see his urgent need of rest. "I'll rest next year," he promised. "Next year I shall be—will you believe it?—lecturer in Philosophy in my own college. Chadding has said it. I'll take it easy for a year. I don't want to die—not just yet. There's things I've got to get out and written down. One of these days there'll be a brass plate on a filthy Walthamstow court. 'Here was born Henry Arthur Kersent, Doctor of Philosophy,' with the name of my magnum opus, and a verse or so. 'Breathes there a man with soul so dead, Who never to himself has said, In hovel born, in gutter bred, Long live the alum from which I fled.'" He pushed back his untidy hair. "I shall climb on the heads of my fellows," he

said, "a ghost from the land of the dead. Maybe I shall dine at rich men's tables. I should n't wonder if I put my knife in my mouth and wiped my nose on my napkin."

I worked doubly hard to make up for his involuntary defecation. Now that I had almost decided to follow Mick, my own research work seemed less important. I did enough at it to satisfy my masters, but more and more I withdrew my living interest from it. In spite of a certain relief that the prospect of release gave me, I began to stagger under the double weight. Headaches tormented me. I had to drive myself to get on with lectures and study courses, driven as I was by the urgent crying hunger of the men who came to learn of us, poor learners ourselves. Work accumulated about me. The thought of it followed me into my dreams. Sometimes even I could not work for that sense of the dreadful goading need to hasten that was on me.

And as if we had not enough to do, Oliver suggested that we wrote our own textbooks. The idea took hold upon me until I began at last to feel that it must be carried out. It was a bur that fastened on my unrest. I lay sleepless in bed composing passages of a preliminary textbook of biology. The want of suitable books had always hampered us. Our needs were peculiar. We had to deal with men who were at one and the same time ignorant and learned. Before young Donnel came to us he had read voraciously in biological works, out-of-date and modern, all were alike to him. And he could not get his ideas and his knowledge into the spoken or written word with half the ease of a child of ten bred in a decent home. I was constantly amazed at the extent of his knowledge of odd things, and as constantly at the depths of his ignorance of common ones. His was a normal type of mind among our students. We wanted special books for their special needs. I began to think that with a little correlating, revising and extending, the courses we had worked through with them would make excellent textbooks for new students. Not only biology and science generally, but literature and all of the arts subjects could be arranged for in the same way. The others had had just the same trouble as I with the standard books.

We set to work. Kersent undertook a history of Greek phil-

osophy that would give explanations of many things taken for granted in all but the most elementary books, and answer questions asked and answered in the more abstruse. The men who came to us wanted the little explanations and the abstruse answers at one and same time. Margaret started a brief comparative history of literature that should not be crammed with dates and names. Oliver and Anthony helped her. I began with the biological textbook of my imagination. I meant to go on to geology and psychology next.

A fury of work possessed me. I worked like a man imprisoned in a fallen tunnel, delving frenziedly at the earth. Work was my food and sleep and the air I breathed. I felt an unnatural inspiration. I wrote at night until I was worn out and refreshed myself by writing again. Never before nor since then have I been able to write like that. The worker bee is supposed to work itself to death in quite a short time. It is a perfection of the communal ideal which I cannot admire. I was none the less imitating it to the best of my ability. A streak of madness must have showed itself in me. I took to work as my grandfather took to destruction and perhaps in much the same frame of mind.

In March two of our books were printing. Margaret's uncle lent her the money for the initial cost. We meant to sell the books at cost price, and pay him back so, bit by bit.

One maggot begets another. We were bubbling over with the things we wanted to say and could not fit into textbooks. Pearls of wisdom were being lost to the swine because we were not able to cast to them. We conceived "The Dawn." The mental effort that produced the remarkable title carried us on to the poster that advertised it. Streaks of red in a neutral sky and an uncouth man with a pickax rising from the ground: the light shone on his lifted hand. We painted it ourselves on wrapping paper and pasted it on friendly house walls and palings. I saw one of our posters after a rain storm. It looked like a civil war. After that we displayed it on boards slung on the shoulders of amateur sandwichmen. I took my odd holidays between boards.

I wrote a good deal of "The Dawn" myself. It had four pages. As educators ourselves, we had much to say on the

question of education. We had also a page of Eikonoklast notes in which we were ironically severe with well-known politicians and editors. We printed a poem or two of Oliver's in each number. "You'd better keep your copies," he said. "I sha'n't have those poems reprinted. One of these days an old paper with them in will be worth a lot of money."

But we were most concerned with education. We tried to set ajar doors through which workers would get a glimpse of the things they missed because their eyes and ears and minds had not been opened to them. The old Roman wine was not for them; nor Egyptian magic, nor the morning song of Greece, nor medieval glamour. They were men living in the cellars of a palace more wonderful than any built in Babylon, poor blind things that never saw the sun.

We printed "The Dawn" ourselves. Just ten numbers of it appeared at irregular intervals. We had the free use of a printing press that was owned by a handful of cranks with a passion for seeing themselves in type. They had money, and wanted men to think like gods and eat like monkeys. These things marked their difference from ourselves.

There were two compositors among our students. One of them undertook to set up the type and supervise the whole work. The rest of us helped him to the best of our ability. We wrought at night after our classes were over. Our compositor was a cheerful little man with an incorrigibly faithless wife. As he worked he told us of her whims. He read aloud from the proof in front of him. "*What is to be expected . . .* She came back again last night . . . *of a class of sixty children . . .* I opened the door and there she stood . . . *drilled into automatic obedience . . .* it was pouring with rain. She was soaked through . . . *but that they will be trained to respond . . .* 'You'd better come in,' I said . . . *to any mob cry . . .* So she came in and sat down. . . . *We have been a race of adventurers . . .* 'You've let them brasses get awful,' she says . . . *We are still adventurers . . .* Next minute she was down on her knees polishing at 'em with a bit of rag . . . *but you are quenching that flame . . .* Soon's she'd finished, 'Now let's have supper,' she says. 'I'm starving.' She opens the cupboard. 'Humph, you've been doing

yourself well. Cheese and sardines, and what's that — butter? You ain't missed me much!' 'Well, my dear,' says I, 'you been off and then come back to your deserted hearthstone five times now. You can't expect me to miss you with the same anguish I used to. I was always one to suit myself to my surroundings.' She took me up sharp. 'Seems I shall have to stay at home.'"

My memories of "The Dawn" and its joyous enthusiasms are all mixed up with the smell of the warm damp cellar and the amours of the compositor's wife. She was a spry, lively woman, her husband said, and a pleasure to have about the house. When she was about the house. He said that he always knew when she was getting unsettled because she mended up all his socks, and baked a supply of bread and pies. She didn't want to have strange women messing up her things when she was away.

"The Dawn" was the only part of our work that gave us pure delight. Whether it is right to gratify one's partialities at the public cost I do not know. But it is a practice not confined to the editors of revolutionary flit-by-nights, nor indeed to editors.

We sold "The Dawn" at street corners, and outside theaters and public-houses. With unappreciated generosity we presented a copy to every socialist branch in London. We crept about streets at night and shot copies through the letter boxes of drab houses. We paraded the Strand and the streets round the Bank and sold to the beautiful young men who crowded the pavements at the luncheon hour. Jack Chamberlayn, with our posters slung on his back and front, stood outside his Aunt Jane's house and thrust the paper at her when she came out to her brougham. She bought all he had, and gave him the ten-pound note he demanded for the cause to get him to go away.

We wrote at it, weary-eyed and heavy-headed, and roared with laughter at our own wit and sense. Even the unimpassioned Anthony wrote articles in a style heavy with images like the bowed white branches of the may.

In March and April we made ourselves eight "Dawns." On May Day we sold the ninth in Hyde Park, and eleven days later we printed the tenth and last.

I knew it would be the last. As we came up out of the cellar I stumbled dizzily over the doorstep.

In the dark a finger had traced one narrow path of light, a field of asphodel between the cloudy hills.

My eyes burned and my legs shook under me. I took hold on Chamberlayn's arm. We went a few streets in silence.

"You're ill," he said abruptly, "you're damnably ill. Don't you know you are?"

I thought he looked so queer with his hat down to his eyes and his overcoat buttoned up round them that I stood and laughed at him. The tears poured down my face. I leaned against a wall and wiped them away.

"You look so damned funny," I gasped

"Not half so funny as you do, you whey-faced hyena. Here, stand up. Do you want us to be run in jail for my Aunt Jane to bail out? I'll go home with you."

The cool air sobered me before we reached Herne Hill. Chamberlayn hurried me into bed. I fell instantly into a half delirious dream in which I ran after trains and walked the streets of an unknown city in a frenzied eagerness to reach some place or find some person. I opened my eyes for a second on Chamberlayn. He stood beside my bed with a cup in his hand. Some one said, "Better let him sleep. Drink it yourself," and I was off again on my anguished search.

I woke about nine o'clock in a weariness of the flesh worse than any I had ever endured. My brain sagged in my head. A cold bath left me half suffocated. I wanted cups of tea. I went downstairs and demanded them.

"Get back to bed, you maniac," Anthony shouted. "I'm going for a doctor."

"I'll not go back to bed. It's too exhausting," I answered. "And if you make an ass of yourself by going for a doctor, you can put out your own interfering tongue at him. I sha'n't be here. I'm going out."

"Let's run him upstairs."

Chamberlayn shook his head. "I've a better idea. Will you come out of town with me, Joy? You might just as well. You can't do anything in your present state. We'll go down to my cottage at Shenley. At least, it's not mine. It's my cousin's, but he's somewhere in West Africa catching fever and snakes.

It's mine while he's not here. Mrs. Hurford, who looks after it, will take care of you like a mother. We'll set you up in no time." He got up from the table. "Oliver can pack you a bag."

"I'll think about it," I said. "It's decent of you. I'll let you know to-morrow. I can't come to-day. I've got to fix some things at King's."

I held on to my point with an insane obstinacy. At last he gave up talking and let me have my way. It was Saturday, and none of us had any reason for going up to college, but Anthony pretended an urgent need of books and came with me. I was so annoyed by his pestilential good nature that I would not speak to him.

We went into the common room and sat down. It was empty save for a few students playing a very poor game of poker in a state of fearful excitement. I tried to think what I had to do. A new note in Anthony's voice caught my attention. I began to listen. I suppose he was talking to distract my mind. But he had come to something that actively disturbed him. He was speaking with a troubled emphasis.

"You weren't in when I got back from Purley yesterday afternoon," he said. "I wished you had been. I wanted to talk to you." He hesitated. "Things are not right down there," he said.

I glared at him. "Say what you mean, for goodness' sake. What's not right?"

"Can't you see that I'm trying to get it straight in my own head? It's difficult to say. You'd see it all right if you were there. I've guessed at it before, but after staying with them for a whole fortnight I'm beyond guessing. I know there's trouble ahead. The wretched part of it is that there's nothing any one can do."

"If you'd tell me ——" I began.

"I don't see that there's anything you can do. You might speak to Margaret. I spoke to her, but I'm not sure that I did n't do more harm than good. I've made her self-conscious, and that fool is bound to see it, and put it down to the wrong cause. He watches her. He asks her questions and tries to trip her up in her answers. I could n't make it out at first. I thought

it was pure ill-temper. I could have kicked him into the road more than once. Of course, Margaret can be damned irritating when she likes. She's so fiendishly obstinate over little things."

"We know that — but she'll give way on most things for the sake of peace."

"Does n't make up for the times she'll not give way a fraction of an inch. Still — it's Ainslie and not Margaret who's responsible for the uneasy atmosphere of that household."

"Oh, atmosphere," I said indifferently. "You made your own."

"Yes, I thought that. But after a while I knew I was n't mistaken. He did for himself so far as I'm concerned when he tried to question me in an off-hand sort of way about Margaret and our red-headed friend. I just about kept my hands off him when it broke over me what he was getting at."

The walls of the common room swayed backwards and forwards. I turned my chair round and stared out of the open door. Anthony put his hand on my knee.

"Say if I'm boring you, and I'll drop it."

"No, go on."

"It's worried me rather. You see, I made a bad blunder. Ainslie made me so mad that I was n't thinking straight at the time. He'd taken up something I said to him, and gone to Margaret with it. It was at breakfast yesterday morning. 'I thought,' he said, in a ghastly playful fashion, 'that you wrote me Anthony and Oliver were leaving Herne Hill on the Saturday — that week you stayed there in January.' Margaret looked at him. 'I don't remember,' she said. 'I may have written so. I thought they were leaving then.' Ainslie was excited. 'Anthony did,' he told her quickly, 'but he says he left Hearne behind and the slacker never got to Scarborough until the Monday night.' I was furious at having had the amateur detective played off on me. Margaret stared at the pair of us. 'I must have told you some time since, that Oliver never left Herne Hill until the Sunday. I went back there on Saturday night, but he was in bed, and I did n't know he was in the house. The next morning he walked into the room and we gave each other the surprise of a lifetime. I must have told you.' Ainslie pretended

to be thinking aloud. 'Left on Sunday? It took him a long time to reach Scarborough.' Margaret lost her temper. 'What do you want?' she said. 'A Bradshaw? I did n't go running after Oliver and pushing him into trains. Ask him what he did with his time if you want to know.'

Anthony laughed shortly. "This is where I make a fool of myself. We finished breakfast, and Margaret slipped after Keith into the hall. I heard her say, 'So sorry I was cross, sweetheart.' When she came back into the room I told her right out what was the matter with her precious husband. 'You must have seen it,' I said. 'He's jealous of Oliver.' 'Pon my word, she had n't seen it. She got hot. 'You can't think that?' 'I do think it,' I said. I knew I'd done the wrong thing as soon as I'd said it. Next time Ainslie spoke of Oliver she turned peony-colored, and was annoyed with him. Do you suppose he did n't notice? He built a three-volume tragedy on that blush in as many seconds."

Anthony got up and kicked a chair viciously out of his way. "Any one can see the fool does n't do it out of malice. He's fond enough of her. Only he can't let her alone. He must be forever picking over what she's done or is doing, to see if there's anything in it that might be an offense against him." He grinned. "There ought to be a middle way in married dignity, but of the two extremes I prefer the manner of our little compositor. Of course, Ainslie's hampered by his liberal professions. He can't say to Margaret, 'What the devil were you doing that Saturday and Sunday?' He has to sneak round corners, and try to manœuver her into a compromising position. Under such circumstances he's bound to be rewarded by a sight of the compromising attitude sooner or later. Attitude is all a matter of the angle of vision. And if you're not looking straight . . ."

I was tired of watching the corridor ambling past the door like an amiable snake. I turned on Anthony.

"What d'you want to tell me all this for?" I shouted. "What is it to me if they destroy each other?"

I rushed out of the common room. The poker players fixed amazed eyes on me.

Half-way along the corridor I was struck by a sense of incon-

gruity. The old walks echoed to my hurrying feet. In the silence I was a detached, intrusive noise. My unrest shrank, abashed: it became an angle of fire and hid itself between my eyes, its apex in the center of my brain. I walked slowly. On the stairs I met Chadding, Kersent's professor. He stopped.

"Ah, Hearne," he began, and then paused. "You look quite unwell." He fumbled at his glasses. "Most unwell. Do you work too hard? Perhaps you have too many outside interests. Youth will try to serve two masters." He chuckled like an asthmatic bird. "Two masters? Nearer ten, nearer ten."

I remembered what Kersent had told us about Chadding and the invitation to dinner. I longed to take the old snob by his broadcloth tails and dangle him over the iron bannisters. I could see his plump little legs shooting out frantically, and his arms grasping for a hold. I laughed.

"Ah, you are amused," he said amiably. "You don't believe what I say."

"I was only laughing because you are such a fool," I explained. His surprise was so preposterous that it annoyed me.

"You are not yourself, Mr. Hearne," he said. "We will try to overlook this."

He swelled on to the next step. I blocked his way.

"No more are you," I said. "What is yourself? Is it the white podgy you under the broadcloth and the jaeger vest? Good Lord, how funny you must look. Does n't it make your wife laugh?"

He spluttered down my neck.

"No, don't do that," I said. "This is fearfully interesting. Let's think it out. Are you those ridiculous books you write about the Abstract Truth and the Transcendental Reality? Did you hatch them out in your mind? What a thing is this Truth that can arch its back in the sky, and lay eggs in a professor's brain! Do you believe in word-magic, professor? Oh, don't be offended: wiser folk than you built temples on the banks of the Nile and raised themselves a protean shield of names. What a terrible power in the words you evoke that they come in the end to mastering their master! Tell me now — could you push any of those words back into the nothingness whence you called

them? There's an ant or a beetle or something that lifts a few times its own weight. Poor little Chadding-ant, staggering about with Transcendental Reality on his back, looking for a hole to hide it in! Old servant of words. Only words, Chadding, for after all, you never saw the Shining Reality, did you? There have been men said they saw it, but they were lean men with souls of flame. You are a little fat man, and your soul is full of whey."

He seemed to squeeze words out of his indignation. "I will rouse the building. I will have you publicly disgraced. You are drunk, sir. Drunk as a dog. Let me pass."

"No, no," I said. I felt that I was being very cunning. "You sha'n't get away. If I let you go you'll snap at my legs as I go down the stairs, you old crocodile. I must tell you who you are, and then you'll be powerless. If you're not those books, what are you? Somewhere one must get at the soul of you. When you pray. . . . Do you pray to Abstract Reality, Chadding, on your knees by your little bed, and then get in beside your merry wife? Oh, what a queer little object you do look then, to be sure. No, damn it, that can't be you. It's too funny. A soul can't be ridiculous, and would n't be uxorious. I must find you. I'll tear off the coverings."

I believe the poor little beast thought I was going to undress him there and then. He raised a quavering cry. There was hardly a soul in the building, and no one came running to his aid. I plucked at his sleeve. His eyes bulged and mottled patches of color appeared under his skin.

"What's this?" I said. "First shell — scaly jealousy. Jealousy of colleagues, jealousy of the rich men who patronize you. Should n't let 'em, my boy. Uphold the dignity of scholarship. Old Cræsus hands you out his second best in wines, and offers you a cigar, and bets you don't get cigars like this out of philosophy. Your wife pesters you for dresses like Mrs. Cræsus, and wishes she'd married a man with less learning and more cash. Your little soul bubbles within you. You rush to scratch the eyes of your brother monkey up the other philosophic tree. Oh, fie, professor, where was your scholar's calm when you called his cosmic system a pernicious and nauseating fraud? Are n't

your coconuts as juicy as his? What's this? You shock me — what makes you think your wife deceives you? The respectable partner of your connubial joys seeks other arms when privileged to sport in yours! Nonsense, man. It's absurd. No, you don't think that. Your imagination wants toning up. It's going bad: try our septic wash: impurities vanish before it. What's this? Your dignity in danger? You think your daughter sneers at you, and flouts you behind your back. Ah, you mistake. She reveres you. She worships all your attitude; your habits are lovely in her sight. She loves the way you thorough-clean your ears with a corner of your handkerchief in moments of inertia, and your legs surging against the trousers you will have cut so tight. Now where are we? Who is this stately old gentleman with the god-like brow, and the noble, kindly bearing? You don't think that's what you look like! No! Not really? Ha! Ha! Body o' me — skin after skin. I should never come to the end of them. Dignified jealousy, fear, self-adoration, bashful lusts, cancerous crusts of prejudice — layer on layer. Is this the last? It must be. A door, and the door-plate reads 'Truth.' Now I shall see You. Come out, thou naked soul. Come unashamed. Shall He that cares for sparrows forget thee? Why, the place is empty. Clean empty. Did a spider scuttle into that corner? What are you, then? All hail, Abstract Nonentity, Transcendental Husk. I've named you now, so let me go!"

I went stumbling down the stone steps, roaring and shaking with laughter.

Anthony met Chadding coming along the corridor. Tears of rage or mortification were in his eyes. "I've been insulted," he stammered, "shamefully insulted. Mr. Hearne . . ." When later, he was told of my illness, he accepted that in explanation of the incredible scene. "The poor fellow was off his head," he said. But he never forgave me.

Was I off my head to behave like that to an old man, no meaner, no more self-seeking, no more fearful of opinion than the rest of us? Or did I but hold up to him the glass of my own soul?

I stood in the hall, trying to think what I must do before

I could go with Chamberlayn. I saw him standing in the entrance. "I've got a taxi," he said. "Coming for a ride?"

I followed him into the car. "Just a run to clear my brain. I've no end to do."

Anthony, fearing heaven knows what after his meeting with Chadding, had rushed down the stairs in search of me, and out into the quad. Chamberlayn waved a reassuring hand in what might have been the direction of Shenley, and shouted—"See you to-morrow."

We dodged along the Strand. I remember thinking that I was dead, and that Chamberlayn was a jackal-headed god. Long before we reached Shenley I was an unconscious log. They carried me into the cottage and upstairs to bed. It was eight weeks before I made my first feeble journey downstairs again.

CHAPTER IV

I MUST try to be fair to Keith Ainslie. I feel that I am likely to distort him and his motives in the very effort of trying to understand them. Moreover I cannot be prying into his heart. I am neither a confessor nor a psychological haberdasher in the manner of our friend Bloomer. The professional augurs of an older age drew omens from entrails. Civilization has carried us past that. We content ourselves now with making books from them.

I want to leave Ainslie the remnants of dignity that he left himself, and gathered round his nakedness. When I call him to mind, I feel a thrill of half-realized misery: I am abashed before this strange sensing of his grief. I want to shield him from any knowledge of his self-betrayal. I do not want to feel his suffering.

Perhaps this instinctive shrinking of mine accounts for the persistence with which he eludes me. I cannot now tell you anything about him except that he played the fool poorly and suffered for it. I remember things he did and things he said, but I remember them as of one dead, separate disjointed memories, with no sense of a living personal unity to hold them together.

He brought misery on himself and on Margaret. With his own hands he destroyed the fair house of their love that she had set so high. And yet I am grieved for him, and for the ruin he wrought. I do not doubt that every injury he did Margaret turned and rent him in equal measure. Neither do I doubt that he loved her with a backward-glancing tenderness for their idyll. And in spite of love, in spite of his impulses to a frankness that might have saved them, he let his secret resentment carry him uncurbed to disaster. He seemed driven. Pride had a share in that, but only a share. Add the awkward sense of estrangement from Margaret that waxed and grew strong, feeding on itself. He persisted in his way as a wilful child persists in naughtiness

through some queer kink in the mind that will not let it yield to its unacknowledged longing for repentance and forgiveness.

While I lay passing from delirium to unconsciousness and waking to delirium again, their play played itself to an end. I saw nothing of it. I know of it only what Anthony told me, sitting beside my couch in the small white-washed bedroom of the cottage. He had left the aeroplane factory and gone back to the farm. He came down and stayed nearly a month at the cottage when I was getting better. He had not meant to tell me then. But from Oliver's incautious silences I understood that something was happening to Margaret. I insisted upon having the whole story. "You've got to know," Anthony said at last. "I suppose it's better to tell you than to leave you speculating on things."

As he talked, I imagined that I saw between his abrupt, significant phrases the shadows of passions and longings that fought and drew back and closed again in a phantom struggle. He frowned and picked his words. He had heard the beating wings of the hidden wrestlers. He was disturbed and rather resentful.

On the day I went to Shenley in the taxi he had tea with Margaret in the Museum café. She impressed him as having suddenly and strangely lost confidence in herself. She was tired. The lifting vitality had gone from her voice and her pose. He told her that Chamberlayn had taken me to Shenley. "A week or two there will do him good," she said listlessly. "There's nothing serious, is there? Only overwork."

"That's all," Anthony agreed doubtfully. "He's rather queer, though. He'd said or done something to Chaddingbird this morning. The honey-mouthed old hypocrite was fearfully upset."

"We've printed the last 'Dawn,'" Margaret said.

"Until Joy comes back."

"The last of all," she insisted. "We were fools to start it. Joy has half killed himself with work. We must carry on as best we can at Hammersmith while he is away. If he's going to be away long . . ."

She sat looking absently at two Frenchmen who were talking

at each other across the next table with every appearance of overmastering excitement. To them a colorless Englishman. They addressed him in overfluent English. "Ah, dear friend, how much we have interested ourselves in your wonderful Museum. It is superb, but it is sorrowful. To think that the joy and beauty of the Greeks — those wonderful children — should come in the end, dismembered like Osiris, to a house in Bloomsbury."

"Eh?" said the Englishman, "why not?"

Margaret glanced at Anthony, smiling faintly. She turned her eyes from the too-reflective foreigner. "I wish," she said abruptly, "you'd keep Oliver away from Keith for a while." She made a nervous gesture. "I know it sounds hateful. He's an old friend. A dear friend. But I must get things straight. Somehow I must get them straight. I must try and get Keith to talk. Things are impossible as they are."

Anthony began a vague apology. She frowned. "Oh, don't. How could it be your fault? I should have seen it for myself in the end. Only I never thought. And I'm glad to have it plain." Her voice halted, and she straightened herself wearily in the comfortless chair. When the Museum authorities decided on concession to the horrid fact of scholarly stomachs, they took care to concede as little as possible to that doubtless atrophied organ.

While Anthony sought for words, she began again slowly. "I seem to have made a failure of things. I can't understand why or how." She smiled. "I've kept my share of the bargain. One ought to keep one's bargain, eh? But it is only just, surely, to expect some one else to keep the other half of the pact. I must have failed somewhere."

Her glance wandered to the next table again. The Englishman had entered into a solemn discussion of automatic pianos. "Oh, yes," he said loudly, "in a few years there will not be an ordinary piano made. All the tones and half-tones of expression will be faithfully reproduced by the record. There will be no need for hands. Hands stumble. The mechanical piano never will."

His listeners nodded their heads. "The piano is a dreadful

instrument," one mused. "The apotheosis of beer gardens, drawing-rooms in the suburbs, picture palaces and mission-rooms. But you are too optimistic, my dear friend. Alas, if there were no more pianos, with what would your English misses amuse their leisure time?"

Margaret laughed outright. "Come," she said. "Let's go before I disgrace myself any more. Things aren't so bad as you might think, listening to my feeble moans. I shall come through alright."

She walked through the Egyptian Gallery, with a smile for Amen Hetep III. "You'll come up to Herne Hill now?" Anthony said. Margaret hesitated. It was unusual for her to be in town at the week-end. Keith never went to the factory on Saturday, and we had arranged the classes so that we could do without her that day. "Keith went off early this morning," she said at last. "He expected to get back about seven. I'll come up for an hour."

They reached Herne Hill soon after five. Through the open window of the sitting-room they caught sight of Ainslie, sitting there alone. Margaret gave a little gasp. She hurried indoors.

"Why, Keith," she said, "why did n't you say you would be here?"

"I knew you would come," he told her somberly. At this moment Anthony had a queer foreboding of trouble.

"It's just a chance that I came."

Keith shrugged his shoulders clumsily.

Anthony did not know just what happened. He said that they seemed to be suddenly in the vortex of an incredible upheaval. He went along to the kitchen to ask for more tea. May was there alone. Her behavior puzzled him. He thought she seemed defiant, and at the same time furtive and uneasy. He came back to the sitting-room. As soon as he stepped inside the door the foreboding returned, striking harshly across his senses.

Margaret was standing by the window. She spoke with a queer note of amazement. "I don't see what you mean."

"Oh, yes, you do," her husband said. "You see quite well. Calvert here, sees too. What sort of a fool have you taken me

for — the lot of you?" He began suddenly to talk at the top of his voice, beating upon one hand with two fingers of the other in an impotent gesture of emphasis. He abused Margaret and Oliver and indeed all of us. "You and your ideas ——" he said, and choked. "To hell with your ideas."

Margaret stood with her fingers pressed against her cheeks. It was a little nervous mannerism into which she fell unconsciously in moments of excitement. Anthony remembered noticing oddly that her cheek bones were quite high. "They'd show up if she got thin," he thought irrelevantly. Ainslie was getting out an extraordinary tale. "A slut of a kitchen girl," he said. "Could n't you even hide your intrigues from servants?"

Margaret gave a little gasping laugh. "Oh, Keith," she said, "don't talk like that. We're not at a play. Intrigues!"

That sobered him: he tried to speak quietly. Anthony began to see his way through the tale. The whole thing turned on that week-end in January. May had started the mischief. "Filthy-minded little harlot," Anthony thought. He was vaguely surprised: he had not credited her with the brains. But it had not been a question of brains, he reflected afterwards. An accidental silence and then a piece of half-meaningless insolence — that was all there had been in it at first. Then Keith had come with his suspicions. "I wonder if he questioned her outright," Anthony said scornfully. "That must have been a queer affair."

May saw a chance of avenging her misfortunes on Margaret's prosperity. I think she hated Margaret in an obscure unreasoning fashion just because Margaret had witnessed the piece of unsuccessful play-acting in the kitchen. Maybe she hardly provisioned the disaster she was drawing on. Untidy, muddy-eyed Fate, she had not a whit of imagination. Her vengeance was half just malicious stupidity. She fell to Keith's suspicions. She wanted to make things disagreeable for Margaret. Afterwards, she must have been frightened. She reiterated her accusation blindly.

Keith had her in. She was sullen, and looked at Margaret with an odd enough expression of appeal. To Keith's questions she answered readily. Oh, yes, Mrs. Ainslie had known young

Mr. Hearne was in the house that night. "I told her myself," she said, with a quick indrawn breath. Margaret turned her back deliberately, and stared out of the window.

Anthony's indignation got the better of his awkward resentment of the scene. "If you don't send that girl away," he said to Keith, "I'll take her by the shoulders and run her out, and so I tell you." May turned abruptly, and in the doorway ran into Oliver. No one had heard him come in. She threw him one scared glance, and scurried along the passage. They heard her sobbing loudly in the kitchen. "You know, he must have been listening in the passage, that precious brother of yours," Anthony said. "He knew what was the matter."

But before he could say anything, Margaret had come up to Keith and laid her hand on his shoulder. "Keith, my dear," she said, "let's go home. We can't talk about things here. Come." He seemed to hesitate. Oliver rushed into the conversation like a fool. "Yes, go," he said to Keith. "Take yourself away, and by God, don't let me see your face here again, you dirty spy."

Anthony stopped in his narrative to reflect. "I think that was unjust," he said. "I don't believe Ainslie came definitely to spy. He must have brooded over that unfortunate week-end. I believe he just came with a restless kind of feeling that there on the very scene of it, something might turn up to illumine it for him. You see, he couldn't ask Margaret about it. He had to pretend that he was an enlightened person with a soul above petty conventions. And yet it had irked him to think of Margaret and Oliver alone in the house. With all his jealous suspicions of Oliver."

Ainslie pushed Margaret's hand off his arm and turned on Oliver. "They made the most unholy fools of themselves," Anthony said.

Oliver did not see or did not care what mischief he was making by his aggressive insanity. Keith worked himself into an incredible rage. "I'm not a fool," he shouted. "I don't go round supposing unspeakable things just because a man and a woman spend a week-end in each other's company. But if it was all right why did you lie about it? Why tell me you were surprised to meet each other the next morning, when the girl had told Margaret you were in the house? And where were you on Sunday

night? Walking about London. I don't believe you. Margaret says she was at Purley, but no one saw her go into the house."

That may have been an angry venture: I do not think that Ainslie had been questioning his neighbors. But it turned out to be quite true. Margaret had let herself into her house in the darkness of a January afternoon, made tea in the kitchen, and gone early to bed. No one saw her go in: no one saw a light in the house.

Keith stopped for breath: his face was distorted. Anthony thought he might be a little mad. Margaret chose the moment to make another appeal. She seemed unconscious of any one but Keith. She held out her arms. God knows what she thought of then. Maybe of a quiet waking, and Keith's face close to hers in the luminous dawn.

"Come away, my darling." She just touched his cheek. "Don't you see this is all madness? Take me away now. I want to talk to you. I will tell you anything you like. My dear, oh, my dear." Keith laughed. He said harshly, "Yes, you'll talk to me. I don't doubt that. You'll talk until I don't know lies from truth, and then laugh at me for a fool. I don't want you. You can go where you damn well like, and do what you like. I'm done with you."

Margaret pressed her hands against her breast. "You don't know what you're doing, Keith," she whispered. "You don't mean the things you say."

"I mean every word of it," he repeated loudly. "I'm done with you. Lies and lies . . . I loathe the sight of you."

She turned to go, stumbling a little in the blindness of her humiliation. She slipped away so quickly that she was at the front door before Anthony reached her.

"Margaret, where are you going? Wait a minute. I'll come with you," he said uselessly.

"I'd rather not," she told him. "I don't know yet where I am going. I'll go for a walk first. I'll be all right." She looked past him, and put her hand on the gate.

"A minute," he said, searching vainly for words. "You can't go like that. Where can we find you? You'll come back? This will blow over."

"That does n't matter," she answered him in a level voice. "I could n't come back. I don't think I want to see any of you again."

"What about money?"

"There's nearly fifty pounds in Lloyd's left of the money my uncle put there in my name to use for the books. I'll take part of that until I can settle something."

She was gone. Anthony strode back into the sitting-room. "You fools!" he stammered. "You fools. What in God's name do you think you've been doing? Quarreling like a couple of drunken sailors in a bawdy house. You've no right. You've no right. Don't you either of you think of any one but yourselves?" He turned on Keith. He wanted to say more, but he was startled by a glimpse of misery lurking behind the man's fury. He let him go.

It was about a fortnight later that Margaret sent for Anthony. He went to her rooms in Bernard Street and she told him that Keith intended to divorce her. She did not tell him at once, but spoke first of her plans. "It was well I finished my research work to time," she said. "I gave in the thesis, and they were well pleased with it. I have a good recommendation from that quarter."

"You're not going to teach, Margaret?" Anthony said.

"God forbid. But it has got for me a temporary post at a school in Hampstead. A mistress is ill and taking half a term off. That gives me time to think. I want to train for something. Something done with hands, I mean. I couldn't be a typist or anything like that, you know. I'd like to work all day with my hands and have my brain to myself at night. Did Keith ever tell you that I wanted to go into the factory? I did, but he would n't hear of it. I am trying to find out how I can be trained in tool setting. I should like that."

"You're really rather a queer old thing," he said affectionately.

She looked at him with a troubled frown. "Do you think so? I don't care to be queer. I've thought about it a good deal. Only, there's so little I could do. I have no taste for journalism and no notion of how to set about such a career. I don't want to be either a teacher or a clerk or a secretary. The only thing I

ever wanted to be was a student." She laughed diffidently. "I have a passion for reading the works of other men. I want to know languages."

"You know four," Anthony interrupted.

"I want to know more. I want to be able to read in Russian and those queer semi-Russian tongues. I want to know what dead men thought and dreamed. What use I could make of such learning I don't know. Indeed, I don't want to make use of it. I have no genius, but only a fatal attraction towards the genius of other men."

"Sounds an unsatisfactory sort of an ideal to me."

"Yes, I know, I know," she said hurriedly. "And a selfish one. Why should I enjoy such privileges with so many millions of my fellows deprived of them forever?"

"I should n't worry about that, my dear," Anthony told her drily. "By the time you've learned tool setting and Russian your scruples about sharing those delights with the rest of us will have died a natural death."

"I should always be ready to help people who needed help," she murmured. "People like our Hammersmith students, I mean."

It was clear that she had a vision of herself in a garret, palely ascetic over her books, growing old in scholarship amid a company of poor scholars. And upon my word, I might have had a stout fight to drag her from her dreams.

Anthony stifled his doubts. "What about Keith?" he asked.

"Oh! You don't know. I meant to tell you. He is applying for a divorce."

The imperturbable Anthony leaped to his feet. Margaret looked at him with a flickering smile. She seemed rather pleased with the effect of her words. I believe she suffered acutely during this time, but she had a queer faculty of detaching herself from her emotions and criticizing the play.

"Look here," Anthony babbled, "you're well rid of the man. But are you sure you're happy? I mean — oh, damn it — you can't want to be divorced." He found himself in the middle of an impossible offer to mediate.

"No, nothing can be done." Margaret assured him, "You

see — if he wants to be free, he's got to be free. And there does n't seem any other way. I could n't insist upon making it hard to get rid of me." She stopped and flushed painfully. She began again in a low hurried voice. "There's something else. I went to see him again — last week. At first I thought I could n't go. I could n't forget things. But I did go. He would n't listen to me. He wanted me to confess that I was — guilty, he called it. He said he'd forgive me if I'd confess." She laughed softly. "I was very nearly tempted to work up an heroic repentance."

Anthony stared at her. He had an impulse to get up and run from her laughter that hurt like weeping and her absurd, pitiful courage.

"But anyway, it's quite impossible now," she said. "I did what I could. But after that scene at Herne Hill . . . And even if he said he believed my word, and asked me to come back to him, what sort of life would it be for us — with all this behind?" A little later, she added, "I sha'n't make any defense. If Oliver likes to defend himself, of course I shall back him up. But if it is left to me, I shall do nothing. It's a pretty wretched sort of a way out, but it's the only one, and I'd die rather than appear to be trying to keep a man who wanted to be rid of me."

"You would n't," Anthony began. The hopelessness of the situation broke on him, and he found nothing else to say.

He could find nothing more to say now, as he told me about it. "There is nothing to be done," he repeated. "They've got to be free of each other. No reconciliation would hold now. Keith has opened the only door on to freedom — short of committing suicide, or conspiring to appear a faithless and evilly-disposed husband. I suppose he could have waited, and worked the desertion trick. But when you're hot and sore, you don't think of waiting. And Margaret, being Margaret, won't hinder him."

I nodded. Anthony got up and stood with his back to me, looking out of the window at the fields of long grass, whitening beneath the passage of the wind.

"There's something else to tell you. It has worried me rather during the past few weeks — knowing it. David saw you and

Margaret last summer at that little place on the coast — I forget its name."

"The devil he did."

"He and my mother were staying at Scarborough, and they went over there for the day. Of course, my mother did n't know you, and David said nothing. He knew you from the photographs I have at the farm, and some old fisherman or other, seeing him staring at you, told him you were staying in the place. Told him your names and said Margaret was a good lass, and you made a fine upstanding pair, or words in the dialect to that effect." He swung round. "Of course," he said carefully, "I know it's got nothing to do with all this other trouble, but I thought I'd tell you. I'd suspected once or twice before that things were — like that between you. But you were both so damned cool."

I tried feebly to appreciate this sudden turn in the conversation. "You're right," I said at last. "It had nothing to do with all this. Margaret would n't give Keith up for me. I wanted her to."

"Besides," Anthony said, with a flicker of sarcasm, "it would be no use to Keith even if he found out. They were n't married then. Might be evidence of character in the Divorce Court, of course."

"It would be no use to him," I murmured. "Everything was all square."

"Ask him to believe that." Anthony stopped, and with an abrupt change of tone — "You understand that I knew it had nothing to do with this." He began at once to tell me that every one of our textbooks had been sold. "We called a general meeting just before I went home, and told them about you, and explained that the classes would have to be given up for the time being. We got permission to leave our little library in the cellar, and put it in charge of young Donnel to lend out books and be generally responsible for them. They were fed up to hear you were ill."

"That drawer," I interrupted, "is full of their letters. I've been meaning to get you to go through them and send suitable replies." I yawned deliberately.

Anthony grinned. "Oh, all right," he said. "I guess you've had as much as you can stand. I'll go out for a bit." He paused at the door. "I hope to God I've done the right thing in letting you know all this now."

My head was heavy and stupid. I went back wearily over the phrases of Anthony's tale. Margaret would be free. I had no throb of exultation. I could feel her humiliation: it lay heavily on my spirit. I wanted to comfort her. My weakness irritated me. The couch was horribly narrow. I would get back to bed. I wondered wretchedly why she did not write me.

CHAPTER V

ANTHONY was leaning out of the window as she came down the road. He left the window and stood beside my bed, looking down at me. "Joy," he said gently, "Margaret is here. I had a letter the other day, saying she would like to come."

"Go and bring her," I said. The weakness of my limbs seemed turned to a quivering molten flame. I tried to sit up. He pushed me back on the pillows and went. I heard the nurse's voice. "Oh, yes, we were expecting you, Mrs. Ainslie. Mr. Calvert said you'd be here. I know he'll be pleased to see a fresh face. He is heartily sick of the rest of us. You'll remember not to excite him, of course."

She opened the door and Margaret followed her in. With the least trace of hesitation Margaret walked across to the bed, and bent down to kiss me. I felt her lips on my cheek, and the blood thudded in my ears. The very power of response seemed drawn out of me. I saw the nurse's round face, with its expression of amiable surprise. Then she too went. The door shut behind her. Margaret sat down in the low window seat. She was thinner: her cheek bones showed more plainly. There was just enough brooding of pain in her eyes to lift her from mere beauty into the heart of loveliness. I watched her as she sat there, very stiff in the neck and straight in the back, with no concession to the curves of the chair-back. She held herself bravely.

"Anthony told you?"

"Yes."

She smiled at me. "I've made an awful mess of things. Don't you think so, Joy? I could n't do anything. I could n't take you and I could n't keep Keith."

I could only lie and look at her. The sights and sounds of misery make the words stick in my throat. I feel before them nothing but a blind, helpless rage. I could feel her misery, but I could not touch it to comfort it. I wondered what was wrong

with me. Some fantastic twist of my mind evoked a forgotten memory. I saw myself as a great awkward boy of nine or ten, standing in the street beside a weeping child. I felt again my acute misery and discomfort. The child wept on, and I stared at it. My ears burned and my eyes smarted. Suddenly I dived into my pockets and found there heaven knows what of treasure — knife, ha'penny, blood alley — all the rest of a boy's hoard when his hoard has to be guarded on his person from domestic piracy. I stuffed the whole lot into the infant's hands and pockets, and took to my heels, bowed down by a sense of irretrievable loss.

The absurd scene shone before me in the colors of life. I saw the read streaks in the big blood alley, a king and a colossus among marbles. Could I give Margaret anything? A wave of hysterical laughter surged up in my throat. I glanced at her, and the look on her face sobered me.

She was looking at something her own mind had conjured up. Her hands were folded on her lap. Perhaps she was feeling her isolation and my inability to help her. Suddenly her lips quivered. She turned her face to me, all twisted like a child's who is trying not to cry. She got up and knelt down by the bed, and laid her face against my breast.

"I can't bear it," I heard her whisper. "Oh, Joy, I can't bear it. What they'll say . . . How can I live among people again?" I put my arms round her, and stroked her cheek and her hair.

Something moved in me, broke loose from its moorings, and lifted in the new warm sea of happiness that filled my senses, I lifted her hand so that it lay across my lips. Now it was I who floated in that sea, in a radiant flood of light. I soothed her and touched her. My fingers trembled. "My dear," I whispered. "My dear, my little girl. Oh, you are in my heart. I love you." I tried to raise myself in bed so that I could hold her better. The movement roused her from her abandon of grief. She lifted her head, and drew herself out of my arms. "How wicked of me," she said. "I am doing you such harm."

"Do I look as if you were doing me harm?" I answered her. "Come here. Come beside me, or I'll get up and hold you so that you can't get away,"

She laughed a little at that, and came to me again. "I want to feel you in my arms," I said. "Oh, Margaret, to have you again." She crouched down, kneeling on a little hassock, and half lying on the bed. Her face was close to mine on the pillow, and we lay in each other's arms like two children, tired of playing. I kissed her dear face and her closed eyes. "You'll let me take you away after all this?" I whispered. "We'll go right away. You shall forget."

She laid her hand against my mouth. "Don't let's talk of that now."

We talked no more. I shut my eyes, and opened them to look at her again, lying beside me, still and content. My life seemed ebbing away into hers. I tightened the grasp of my arms. She moved a little and her lips touched mine.

She went away in the evening, after telling me to sleep and grow strong. I listened to her voice and Anthony's as they walked down the road. I pressed my face on the pillow where hers had lain, and stretched out my arms in the fragrant dusk.

CHAPTER VI

AINSLIE'S petition for divorce was heard and granted. There was no defense. Between us, Anthony and I had restrained Oliver's desire to go into court, and, he said, blast Keith Ainslie's character for life.

Who would flog the dead dog of the divorce laws, if the rotting corpse were not an offense on the public highways? The whole thing is for pure amazement. I am inclined to think that it matters not one jot whether divorce be hard or easy, so long as it is still made an occasion for public comment and embarrassment. Imagine it! Grave and worthy gentlemen, reading the puerile intimacies of the sinners' letters, squatting on their judicial heels by the side of servant girls to peep through keyholes into bedrooms, pulling the very sheets off the adulterous bed. It is no longer allowed to execute a man in public, although at the time of his happy translation he is fully clothed, prayed over, and otherwise sanctified according to the laws of revenge. But before you can get rid of your wife you must strip her in open court, with witness of letters, amateur detectives, hotel-keepers, or any other little accessories before the fact of her nakedness.

Could anything be more revolting or degrading, more offensive to common humanity and common decency — except, perhaps, the spectacle of a hardened loafer, incontinently starving himself to death in the publicity of the Embankment instead of loafing to his death in a club armchair behind a Piccadilly window and a bottle of seltzer water?

Determined compassion might find excuse for the Embankment nuisance: it may be that some chance made him ineligible for the decent privacy of the armchair. But what, by the laughter of the gods, can be said in defense of a people who permit the public spectacle of Mr. A. flinging accusations at Mrs. A. "Madam, you have allowed yourself to share beds with Mr. X.," and her retort, "Sir, you are a liar, and as bad yourself"?

There was once a judge who refused to make absolute a woman's divorce obtained against her husband, because the miserable woman had herself given birth to an illegitimate son. The honorable judge, acting doubtless that it might be fulfilled which was written in the scriptures saying, "I will visit the sins of the fathers upon the children," condemned the woman to remain shameful in her own sight and her child to be a bastard with a "Fie upon you for a bold-faced jig," delivered with all the awful solemnity of the bench.

Oh, race of moral apes, who will credit in a thousand years that his dress of a little brief authority could lead man into such impertinent fatuity?

It would be better to return to the old Catholic ideal of indissoluble marriage. That at least is dignified, and has the graces of austerity.

But cannot a marriage be ended with decent dignity? Is there nothing between the Catholic way and the present grave indecency?

I wrangled with myself, arguing these things, through the days before Margaret's divorce so that I should not find quite intolerable the knowledge of her sick humiliation.

What she suffered, her husband suffered also. They were tearing themselves free, bleeding and wretched. In their desperation they dealt each other blind, mad blows. With whatever ardor they had desired it, there could have been no reconciliation for them after that sorry struggle.

Two days before the hearing of his petition, I saw Keith Ainslie for the last time. I was sitting in the Temple Gardens. He came striding through, passing me unseeing. His shoulders drooped, and he walked like a man in the grip of an uneasy foreboding. I thought, "He does n't altogether believe his own accusations." He passed round a corner, and out of my sight.

Margaret left London the day after the divorce. She went to Scotland, where her uncle had arranged to have her trained in tool setting. He probably thought it an unconscionable whim, but he gave way to it as readily as he would have done if she had asked to be given an aeroplane and taught to fly. "He said," Margaret told me once, "that my father was a fool, and that I

was under the double disadvantage of being a woman and his daughter."

I saw her the day before she went. I had known all along that for a little while at least I should have to leave her alone. After her tremulous surrender at the cottage, she had stiffened herself and drawn away into an obstinate isolation. Maybe my weakness had disarmed and my strength repelled her. She set up against it a strength born of her terrible dread that we should pity her. In her raw misery she asked nothing but to be left behind her defenses until she had made herself a new shell to cover the shrinking spirit.

I schooled myself to ask nothing of her, not even that I might comfort her. Our last evening together shook my resolution. She sat beside me in the lounge of her hotel. She had left her rooms a week before, flying from an imaginary curiosity. We watched the excited groups over their war news.

"When are you going, Joy?" she said.

"I shall go to-morrow," I answered. "I was only waiting for this to be over. As a matter of fact I went yesterday and was examined, and got three days' leave."

She looked at me, and then away across the lounge. "Give you good luck, Joy," Her voice shook.

I bent over her. "Is that all?" I whispered. "Margaret — have you no love for me that I can take with me?"

I felt her arm tremble against mine. "Ah, don't make me think of it," she said. "It sounds cruel. You are going — perhaps you will be killed. I know I ought to be ready to give you anything, say anything. But I can't pretend to you."

"I don't want you to pretend."

"You must let me alone. Oh, I think I want nothing now but to go quietly all the rest of my days. It is as if they'd torn the past away from me, and the beauty I had in it. Everything has been spoiled — not just the years of my marriage. It is my past that he has made hateful and ridiculous — the past that remained beautiful in spite of all. I cannot bear to remember that I put it in his power to such an extent. I have been so shamed."

We were silent awhile, and then she said, "I'd like to go and look at London. I may not come back to it again."

We set out and walked down Southampton Row, and into the Strand. I think Margaret found a kind of comfort in the jostling of crowds who did not care and did not know her. I thought of the exultation that had leapt through me on that night when Mick and I made our trial of the great city. I laughed a little at the two awkward boys.

We went back to her hotel along the darkened streets round the Museum. My heart failed me. "Margaret," I said, and took her in my arms. We clung to each other for a moment. She lifted her face, very pale and youthful-seeming. I took off my hat and stooped to kiss her. She drew my head down, and kissed my hair.

CHAPTER VII

THE war crept into my life as the sea floods slowly up the creeks of an island that the full tide will submerge. My absorption in Margaret took off the fine edge of excitement. I went mechanically about the business of enlisting.

I had come back to London in July. I meant to go out to Mick. He had just got his chance of cotton land, and was hesitating to take it. "My research work must come first," he wrote. "I'm doing big things out here. I tell you I'm quoted all over India. . . . If you could come and manage for me, or something of the kind, it would just about save the situation."

I cabled that I would come.

In a few weeks we should be scattered over the earth. We revived the Eikonoklasts, and met twice a week to honor our passing youth with phrases. Anthony was on his farm. Chamberlayn was going to Italy to make roads. Mick and I would be in Barbados together. I did not intend to go until the late autumn. I had not the least doubt but that Margaret would be ready then to go with me. All my plans for the future were made in that faith. Margaret knew it, and said nothing to upset them. She went on planning her life as if it were to be lived alone. But I think she would have come with me in the end.

I could not get her to join the new Eikonoklasts. On the nights when she thought they would be at our rooms, she did not come near us. When we left Herne Hill, we found temporary rooms in a street of small houses off Shepherd's Bush Road. There we lived in the bosom of a family that embraced ten canaries, three dogs, two Spaniards, and a neurotic husband. Our overworked landlady took a liking to Margaret and on the days she came to see us ruthlessly turned birds, dogs, foreigners and husband out into the kitchen.

Margaret came one night, and found Kersent already there. She had not seen him for a long time. She shrank from meeting

him. "He is inhuman," she said. "It didn't matter before. But I don't want to meet him now. He will look upon me as a person who has made a silly failure of things. He has only scorn for failure."

She stiffened herself to meet him. Before she had been in the room three minutes, I saw that she had been right in her judgment of him. His attitude to her had altered in spite of himself. He treated her with the rather exaggerated deference he kept for inferior beings. It must have fallen on her like stripes on a raw wound, but she smiled, and was hardily witty.

We had to decide what could be done for the students we were abandoning. Curiously enough, Kersent, who had been least enthusiastic for the Scheme, was most reluctant to give it up. He could hardly be got to discuss things. But we could think of no one to whom we might appeal to take our place. Alone, Kersent and Oliver could do nothing. We decided to call a general meeting of students. I intended to give away all my books, except those that Oliver wanted. We would tell them that Kersent and Oliver were ready and eager to give what help they could to men who came to them. What more could we do?

We were still talking when the door opened, and Chamberlayn came in with the news of the Austrian ultimatum. He was filled with an incomprehensible excitement. We laughed at him.

I shall never be certain whether we laughed because we were fools or because we were honest men.

I dare say our laughter was that of a good many honest fools. For all our deep social preoccupation, we had never lifted our eyes beyond the limits of our island society, its injustice and its shortcoming. We had made some vague unconscious assumption of the general peacefulness of civilized countries. True, there had been war in the Balkans, but down there men were still half savages — small races lagging on the outskirts of civilization. We drew no portents, imagined no subtle threads of inter-relationship with Near East doings. We simply were not interested. The veriest gutterbred attached more meaning to the phrases of Empire than we did, who professed ourselves an intelligentsia of deeds.

I could give a dozen reasons for our ostrich-attitude to foreign

affairs. But I believe the chief to be that we were never trained to interest in them. The Imperial dash that was added to the milk-and-water of board school and secondary education was just calculated to sicken and disgust any honest child. We turned in loathing from the fat men who babbled on our Speech Days of the glories of our Empire. What were the glories of Empire to us when they came dropping from the mouth of Erasmus Butterby, whom we knew for an arrant scoundrel, buying cheap to sell dear in all his sixty shops with their complement of starved and bullied assistants? What were they to our neighbor in class, whose under-paid sister was a cast-off mistress of Butterby, whose father did the work of six horses for Butterby, and drew therefrom the wretched wage that his mother returned again to Butterby's insatiable maw? We confounded the Empire with Butterby in one precocious sneer.

We did not understand either, that the debauched Imperialism offered to our shrinking gaze was not intended by way of honest enlightenment, but only to fill us with awe of mysteries beyond our ken, and keep us nervously wagging heads and flags a long, long way behind our diplomatists' endeavors.

Perhaps they do these things better in the public schools.

I doubt, however, that there too they get the same suspicious vintage — only offered to their refined instincts in better bottles than those that were thought good enough for us.

When we left school and came to London, our greedy, searching interests fastened naturally on the things nearest us. We became absorbed in our Hammersmith experiment. Gradually the Butterby credo of Trade and Empire took in our minds the appearance of a fantasy. Without really thinking about it at all, we decided that his dreary, smudged picture of world-dominion was a nightmare figment, lingering on in the minds of men who had not noticed that the world was moving beyond them. Kings, generals, ambassadors, all the pageantry of sovereigns, what were they but a masque playing itself out before a curtain, while behind them on the real stage the real play was preparing, the play of humanity moving to the republic of the world? We never talked foreign politics: we never thought of them, except in the way of half-conscious conclusions, arrived at and dismissed in some obscure

region of our minds. We must assuredly have concluded that in all countries right-minded folk thought of redressing the injustice that oppressed their fellows, and were hindered from their incontinent altruism by the selfish plots of rich men. No doubt we recognized the existence also of the wrong-minded, whom prejudice, self-interest, or mere craven stupidity kept on the side of the man in possession. Even, we knew that prejudice and fear were worse enemies of justice than riches, however ill-gotten. Had we followed up this train of thought we might have arrived at the possibility of war. But civilized nations do not fight. What then are armies for? We might have replied that they were, strictly speaking, to be regarded as a charming medieval relic, the last of the Guilds.

As a matter of fact, the question never arose. We assumed international peace. If we thought of war at all, it was to play with the possibility of revolution and a barricade across the Strand. And that we did not take seriously.

The murder of the Archduke had not much interest for us. It interested me least of all, with my eyes drawn always to the spectacle of Margaret's failure and humiliation. Besides, we never read the type of newspaper that seized on all occasions, and on this no less than others, to point the signs of the times for an unheroic and trustful generation.

We laughed at Chamberlayn and his talk of war. Then, partly to pacify him, we asked questions.

He was all too ready to answer us. He began at once to talk at the top of his voice, in a strange tongue, words pouring out in an awkward haste.

"Oh, be quiet with your incidents and your secret treaties," Oliver groaned, "and tell us in plain English — such as we poor unlettered men have and use — what you are talking about."

Chamberlayn had the air of an animated owl. "Look here," he said, "and for God's sake stop pretending that you can't understand. I tell you, I know what I'm saying. It's war — not any old backwater of a war, but real European war. I was lunching at Jane's. She's been complaining to the governor that I neglect her. There was a brigadier-general there who said war was inevitable. No — it was n't a case of the wish being father to the

thought, for he positively looked upon it with dread. Not that he is n't brave enough — I did n't mean that. He lost an arm in the Boer War, and he'd have been lieutenant-general now if he had n't had a sister, or if he'd had another kind of sister. He said it was well known that war was being planned by Germany. He said the French knew it, and the Italians knew it, and the Russian court knew it. Every one knew it but the English, who never know about anything they don't want to happen. Besides, you can't frighten a race that was n't frightened of Napoleon."

Oliver laughed.

"I'm only telling you what he said," Chamberlayn said angrily. "The man's no fool. He said we were n't frightened of Napoleon because we vilified him and made him out such a contemptible little monster that we came to believing he was one. Having a Channel between us and him made a difference, of course."

"Your general seems to have thought about things," Margaret said soothingly.

"He has. That's why I believe in him. He's not one of your side-whiskered old blood-suckers. Besides, I've heard it all before — all he said. He said that people who understood were only waiting for the signs that would announce the opening of the last act. This Austrian ultimatum is the sign. Serbia will refuse . . ."

"Serbia won't dare refuse."

"She will, she will. She's got Russia behind her."

"Then it's Russia that's making war."

"You don't understand." Chamberlayn was beside himself with excitement, and in an agony of annoyance at our stupidity. "Austria did n't send that ultimatum. It's Germany. Every one knows it's Germany. It's either fight her or give in. And if we do give in do you suppose this will be her last demand? She'll go on from bad to worse. She'll interfere and rattle swords all over Europe. Sooner or later, it's war — or surrender to her. Oh, damn you, can't you see it?"

I shook my head. "I don't believe it," I said. "It's too, too plausible. Things don't happen like that nowadays. Germany pushes Austria on to Serbia and spikes herself on Russia. Russia leans on France, France on England, and the whole lot

topple in the ditch. You shove the first man in the line, and they all go over in turn. Oh, altogether too symmetrical. Try again, my son. Besides, nations are n't to be shoved about like that now. You'll see, Serbia will accept the Austrian terms, and your pretty house of cards will crumble on your aunt Jane's dinner table and be removed with the dessert. And the brigadier will commit suicide in his coffee."

Chamberlayn had recovered his calm. "Will you believe I'm talking sense when you read that Serbia has refused?" he asked.

"We'll begin to think about it then," I assured him.

We tried to get back to our students. But Chamberlayn had killed the spirit of discussion. He himself was too restless to join in any planning. "What's the use of talking about the future? In a few weeks there won't be any future, but only one day after another."

In a while he jumped up, and said he could not sit still there. We saw him hurrying past the window with distraction in his aspect.

He left uneasiness behind him. Kersent sat huddled in his chair, a cavernous thing of broken basketwork and rags. His fine hair straggled over the dingy cushions. He seemed sunk in unhappy thought. I tried to rouse him by asking about his work. "I was thinking of war," he said briefly.

"You don't believe in Chamberlayn's line of toppling nations!" I exclaimed.

"On the contrary," he said slowly. "I was just thinking that it would be in some such catastrophic madness that war might come. It would have to come like that — if it is to come at all nowadays."

"It won't come."

Kersent sat up. "What would you do if there were war?"

"Fight," said Oliver simply.

"I don't know," I answered, "that it would be so easy as that. I might have to think about it. Would you fight whether the war were just or unjust?"

"There is neither justice nor injustice in war," Kersent said, before Oliver could speak.

"Some wars are simply a disgrace," I mused. "Like South

Africa. But I can't imagine that there might be a war which would have to be fought — to stave off worse things. Oh, damn it, what would *you* do?"

"I should refuse to fight," Kersent answered.

"No matter what the circumstances?"

"I should refuse in any circumstances."

Margaret was sitting at the table. She turned her head now to look at Kersent with curiosity. "Tell us why," she said.

Kersent roused himself to answer her. It was queer how quickly he responded to any probe of Margaret's. There was, I think, some subtle antagonism between them, which showed itself in Margaret's infrequent thrusts at Kersent; in his quite intolerable deference to her now, and always in his readiness to defend himself before her. He would explain himself to Margaret when indolence or a faint contempt kept him placid and silent under my attacks on his philosophy. He was stirred to explain it now.

"I would n't fight in any war," he repeated. "It's not that I'm afraid. Of course, I can't prove that. You can believe it or not as you like."

"You can leave that bit out," Margaret said briefly.

Indeed we all saw it as absurd to associate cowardice with Kersent's frail body and grim spirit.

"I might offer you all sorts of reasons. That I have better things to do than fight. But you could counter that if you could show the things to be fought for as more important than anything in my life. I might refuse to fight in the wars of kings and capitalists. I'd have a better case there. But after all, a lost war, might be lost for others beside the rich man and his power. Of course in any war, lost or won, he'd suffer least. If war lasted for a dozen years, his wife would n't be pawning her furniture for clothes, nor crying over her starving children. But my reasons go behind and beyond those."

"Religion," Oliver said.

Kersent shook his head. Through the serene voice ran a muffled throbbing excitement, like a thread of fire through wet ling. "No, not religion. I can imagine that a man might have the command to love all men, even the enemy, so ringing in his

ears that he would be prepared to die rather than lift the sword struck from the hand of the disciple in the garden. He would have arrived at my point of view, but by a swifter route."

"I wonder," Margaret began, and stopped. Kersent waited for her to go on. "No, finish what you're saying," she said impatiently. "I don't want to argue with you now. I want to understand."

"It is this — that for me nothing, nothing at all, can justify the taking of life. I have come deliberately to the conclusion that there is no value in life higher than the sanctity of life itself. I would submit to death for this ideal, but there is no other fit to die for."

He broke off. He seemed to be struggling within himself for mastery over an excitement as powerful as Chamberlayn's. Margaret frowned.

"There are certainly other ideals worth dying for."

"For truth," I murmured.

Margaret smiled at me. "Who but a fool would die for truth? Knowing that his truth was but a fragment of a vision — seen all distorted — that might be falsehood to-morrow."

"Martyrs are n't made in that spirit," I retorted.

"Wise men are. Sane men, that love the earth."

"And being earthy, love their own dirty bodies too well to risk them," Oliver growled.

"Is it worse to cherish one's body than it is to cherish and indulge one's soul in the way that Kersent is preparing to do? It's really only indulgence on his part, for he does n't believe that the soul is a spirit persisting after death."

Kersent looked at Margaret with a direct anger. "You're quibbling," he said. "When I said that no other ideal was fit to die for, I meant only that it was the highest possible. Men have died, and always will die for lesser ideals — and all honor to them. Men have been killed in the name of lesser ideals. Never was such a trail of blood as that left by the most successful of ideals — the Christian Church. But a man who kills for his ideal, who goes to war for it, only defames it. I would not fight for my ideal, not because of its unworthiness, but because of its too

great worth. There is no ideal worth killing for. All others are paltry in comparison with that of refusing to kill. It is justifiable only to die for an ideal."

"Now you're quibbling," Margaret said coolly, "and the quibble is really unworthy of you. The man who prepares to kill for an ideal prepares to die. It might even be that the words — 'They that take the sword shall perish with the sword' — are no more a reproach than they are a justification. They might only be to see both sides of the shield at once."

Kersent laughed gently. "See how easy it is to persuade oneself of anything," he said. "There is no surety for the man who takes his stand on ground below mine. When I assert my belief in the supreme value of human life, I place myself and my faith on an unshakable rock, above all winds that blow. I assure you, Margaret, that this belief of mine is not an emotional self-indulgence. Neither is it an intellectual or political foible. It's my reasoned philosophy, embraced after taking into account, as far as one man may, the desires achieved and potential, that have seemed to men worthy of being gratified, or will come to seem worthy of gratification to their developed intellect. Look at all the things to which men have pinned their faith. To the love of a friend or a woman, and the woman betrayed and the friend grew cold. To their country — and their country slandered them, injured them, starved them, and when they died made use of their life and their labors to further aims they had held in life-long loathing. To truth — and even as they died, the cherished truth slipped from their grasp and mocked them in its falseness. To power — what is power but a striving and fretting against unassailable barriers? To fame — and a paltry couple of thousand years is enough to make men doubt whether the famed one were man or woman or legion."

"I don't know who wrote all that unpoetical balderdash of *Beowulf*," Oliver interrupted, "but I should think he'd be pretty mad if he knew he was only the long process of years selecting and arranging the myriad voices of the folk."

Kersent looked absently at him. "In a few centuries," he said, "you and your precious poems will be as hard to trace as your imaginary Celtic ancestors, surviving down the ages in spite of

oppression, massacre and extermination, to wring our hard hearts and shame our wizened visioning."

"Who says my ancestors are hard to trace down?" Oliver shouted. "We've been in Yorkshire for six generations, but we are descended from Kings of West Ireland who were thought enough of to be held for gods after they were dead. I can prove it."

"For pity's sake," Margaret interrupted. "What do you take us for? The meeting of a Yeats Society? Let Kersent finish."

"I have finished," Kersent said. "I have nothing to prove half so fascinating as the possession of ancestors with the morals of goats and the speech of Irish poetasters. Indeed, I have nothing that I can prove. There are certain things that men have always held as valuable—the things I have spoken of—love, truth, all the rest of them. I believe that all these things prove in the end a mockery and a half-satisfaction to the man who possesses them, or thinks himself to possess them. I believe that the only thing in life whose value is eternally certain and satisfying is the sanctity of life. You either believe this or you—don't. Proof is useless or a supererogation. Mark that I did n't just say life. I said the sanctity of life. I can imagine circumstances under which I would infinitely prefer death to life. I can imagine circumstances under which I should doubt that in depriving a fellow-man of life, I was sinning against the highest vision I have. To take away life is the ultimate sin. It is the supreme Denial. It is Antichrist."

His voice broke on a high thin note. We sat looking at him. He moved his head restlessly from side to side. He was like a beast caught in a net.

"To will not to kill is to will only a negation," Margaret said. She spoke as if the words were forced out of her.

"It has another side," Kersent answered. "And its other side is the will to live more finely. That is to say—in more love to one's neighbors. Men who believe as I do will not take life and will do their utmost, by the avoidance of offense, to take from others the temptation to kill."

Oliver roared with laughter. "To listen to you," he said, "you'd think we were in the Middle Ages, with the inquisition at

the door. Do you see the king's majesty and all the peers and judges of the realm rushing to spank Kersent by way of showing him the error of his ways? "

"Things might be made disagreeable for him in wartime," I said. "You remember how in our low-minded and unphilosophic infancy we were persuaded to help smash old Carstairs' plate-glass windows because some one said he was a Pro-Boer. We thought a Pro-Boer was a new and despicable kind of person and we were filled with the reformer's zeal."

"My father was supposed to be a Pro-Boer," Margaret said. "We used to keep the lower windows shuttered, and once a crowd of children from the nearest village came shouting after me — 'Pro-Boer's lass, she's a Pro-Boer's lass.' I hit at them and cried."

We lost ourselves in reminiscence. Kersent sat silent. In the gathering twilight his face took on an odd air of foreboding. Margaret's eyes kept turning to him, but she did not speak to him again. When we were walking down Shepherd's Bush Road she said, "If all men were like Kersent there would be no war. But all men are not, and never will be. There'll always be men cruel and bigoted and jealous and greedy. The task is to make a world in which the tyrant, the bigot, the jealous and the grasping are harmless. Are even given a chance of release from themselves. Men like Kersent will help to do that."

CHAPTER VIII

I STOOD on the edge of the pavement in Shaftesbury Avenue and read that Serbia had refused the Austrian ultimatum. As I read I heard Chamberlayn's eager voice as if he spoke over my shoulder. "Will you believe me when you read that Serbia refuses?"

I tried to understand the implications of the refusal. The solid world seemed reeling under my feet. A phantom traffic swung and roared past me. I stood in a crowd of hurrying phantoms, under a white sky, trying to grasp things that eluded me on every side, queer things looming behind the phantoms, as blurred and indefinite as they, but menacing and insistent. The world as I knew it was cracking and falling apart before my eyes. I peered through the cracks at a world where even the common things of life took on a strange significance. I had prided myself on my clear sight. I had said—the comfortable assurances of the satisfied citizen are not for me. It seemed that I also had been living in a world of comfortable assurances. I wrestled with the immensity of the gulf that opened in front of me. We had all of us become small—Margaret and her ordeal and my love, Chamberlayn's ambition, and Mick's—small and remote. They receded and dwindled. Kersent's face as it had been on that night when we talked of war hung for a moment before my eyes, sharp and distinct, a tiny image flung on a vast screen.

There followed a time of peculiar tension. We bought and read our papers with a half-guilty air of expectancy. That England should fight again in Europe was incredible. We reminded ourselves that she had held back in 1870. We spoke of our fear lest she should fight now. Quite suddenly we were conscious of a fear that she would not fight.

The tension was lightened for us one evening by Margaret's quarrel with a theological student in the quadrangle of King's.

We were standing there waiting for Oliver when the holy man rushed up to us. His name was Farrel: we both knew him slightly. We used to keep up a fiction that Kersent had killed him in debate, flinging his torn limbs under the benches, and that the Farrel who walked about the corridors was a disembodied spirit blown out with the breath of sanctity and sent to haunt Kersent for his contumacy.

He was panting with excitement. "It's war," he cried. "Do you know, I'll swear it's war. There's nothing in the papers yet. I've just been out and bought one to see. But I met Chadding coming out of the Principal's room, and he was saying over his shoulder, 'Oh, there's no chance of peace: it's only a matter of hours.' And you know Chadding's brother is in the Foreign Office."

"You seem damned pleased," I said.

Melancholy descended on him like a cloud. His very hair became lank and drooping.

"Oh, no," he answered. "Oh, dear man, no. Who would rejoice at war? But if we fight it will be a holy war."

"Why, who the devil told you that?" I cried. "You've been peeping through Archbishops' keyholes and listening at cracks in their doors. Common folk like the rest of us have n't been told that yet."

"Why should England fight, if not to keep freedom for weak countries like Servia? And if we fight for freedom it is a holy war." He was perfectly clear on the point, and amazed at our dullness. He forgot to be mournful, and beamed with satisfaction as he went over his argument again.

"It is a Christian duty," he said.

I was for leaving him to his pretty theology, but he had irritated Margaret.

"Why a *Christian* duty?" she said sharply. "Won't all the nations at war be officially Christian? They all accept the doctrines of the Christ, erect innumerable buildings to declare and discuss them, and spend vast sums of money and much labor on the upkeep of an intricately organized and influential religious bureaucracy — on the upkeep of you and your likes, incidentally. And Christ was perfectly clear on the question of taking life. I

am sure you know all the correct texts. 'Love your enemies.' 'Resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek turn to him the other also.' Do you suggest that Christ was n't in His right senses when He said that?"

Farrel blushed for her. "Oh, no. Oh, dear no. I am sure you mean well. But have n't you heard — oh, you must have heard — that the Germans are trampling down Belgium to get at France. If Jesus were alive now, He would wish to avenge Belgium. I have not the least doubt of it."

"Well to be you," Margaret retorted. "But you do not know what Jesus would have done, and you *do* know what He said. No amount of cunning, and juggling with words — be the juggler never so apostolically ordained — can square killing men with the teaching of Christ. You profess to follow His teaching in every respect, but if you kill, or if you advocate killing, you're acting in direct contravention of your Master's repeated words. I don't see how you can get over it. I'm not arguing that you should n't fight. I'm only pointing out that Christ forbade fighting to kill, and you are supposed to be an expert in His commands and prohibitions."

Margaret has a clear voice, and in her anger it becomes extraordinarily clearer. A little crowd of students had gathered round us. She did not seem to notice them, intent on her argument. I daresay she was arguing as much for her own enlightenment as for the annihilation of Farrel. Farrel was hardly worth the trouble.

"I mean," she said, "that if to break the law in one point be to break it in all — and you yourself have said, on the authority of your Doctors, that this is so—then you're simply not a Christian."

"Oh, I can't admit that," Farrel stammered.

Margaret shrugged. "It does n't matter whether you admit it or not," she said. "The sophism of your Church on this point remains indefensible. In the old days, Churchmen made wars, and to-day they condone them. But it is the blunt fact that whatever or whoever has to do with war is not Christ-like. The Church — I mean all organized Christianity except an odd sect or two — long since threw overboard a cardinal point in the teaching of the man whom it calls its divine Founder. Why can't you be hon-

est about it? Of course, no one really cares nowadays what you've thrown overboard or what you've kept. Who would look in the Church for simple faith and honesty? Why, if you — your priests and ministers — were to come out with an honest declaration of a revised and selected Christianity, the world might positively be startled into taking you seriously. But far from attempting honesty, your Church has overlaid its betrayal with a perfect colossal monument of theologies. You can see for yourself. Hardly a soul would think it strange that you, a preacher of Christ, should be blessing the slaying of your fellow-men. Once upon a time, the first people to call themselves Christians went unresisting to their death. They had no doubt but they were in the right. In fact, they shared your happy certitude, but as it happens, with an absolutely contrary conviction. Since that day their company has not increased. It has diminished. Your Church is about two thousand years of time from its founder. In spirit it's about a million years away. It touches His spirit only in minor points. Look for yourself. The Church is rich. Was Christ rich? It is militant. Was He militant? It is bigoted. Was He a bigot?"

She became abruptly conscious that her audience had grown until it filled the steps and overflowed into the quad. With a nod of farewell to Farrel she hurried me away. We heard Farrel's high-pitched voice raised in voluble refutation of her heresies.

We held our last Eikonoklast meeting that night. I described the scene in the quad.

"Oh, good for Margaret," Oliver said. "Of course she was talking rot, but who cares so long as it disturbed the Farrel in his den?"

"It was n't rot," Kersent interrupted. "It's literally true that the man who bases his refusal on the words of the Christ is all that is left of the disciples. I should say that Christ had a few odd thousand followers to-day. I don't profess to be one of them myself, but I've this in common with the unpruned Christian — that we don't regard anything as justification for the taking of human life."

"Then why don't we turn out a revised Christianity?" I said

idly. "A sort of new Creed. This I believe and this I cast from me."

"Well, you can see how dangerous such a course is. If you begin by casting out one point of faith, why should you stop at that one?"

"We have n't, of course," I said. "Our Christian world does n't give of its two cloaks to him, that hath none, and it does n't love its business neighbor as itself. We ought, in honesty, to stop babbling of what Christ would have said if He'd been preaching in the City Temple on Sunday, and say right out that we can't follow His doctrine as He laid it down. In fact, that we'd be craven fools if we did. We should say: there are some circumstances in which men must prepare to slay men: we reject the Christ standard of values: our high tradition sometimes leads us up over the slain bodies of our fellows."

"Then, of course," Kersent added, "you'd be challenged to name the circumstances. You'll have to find a higher value than the Christ-value of unresisting endurance of injury."

"God knows what you all think you're talking about," Chamberlayn interrupted. "What the devil could a man want more to fight than to defend the power and glory of his own country? I mean — it's awful rot to talk about it, really, but if you must talk about it, that's the fact, is n't it?" He glared at Kersent. "You don't want Englishmen to be scattered over the world like beastly Jews? Though of course you can't really kill a race by scattering it. The spirit of race is immortal." He produced this aphorism with the air of a serious man who descends to bandy wits.

Kersent groaned aloud. "Oh, my God, has Oliver been talking to you about the Celt? I suppose Matthew Arnold is really to blame. He set us groping in a Celtic twilight after a flame-haired, blue-eyed wraith, impulsive of deed, lofty of thought, generous of spirit, full of strange oaths and literary inversions of speech. Who will rid me of the body of this death? Who'll stake it down in the ancient past so that we can see face to face the Irishman and Welshman of the day's reality — grasping, unimaginative, unless imagination be vested in spook-ridden poets,

generous and ungenerous, brave and craven, common like the rest of common men? Man, there is no Celt such as ye hunger for. Maybe the Celt of your tradition lives a vicarious and fragmentary life in the blood of half the races of the world. I'm damned if he exists anywhere else."

"Then," said Chamberlayn triumphantly, "if you want to preserve a nationality you'll have to fight for it, or else be scattered and blotted out."

"Is nationality worth fighting for?" I interrupted.

"Oh, if you're going to get on to your paradoxes!" He flung up his hands.

"There's no paradox about," I laughed. "Sniff again, old fox. But listen a minute. England submitted to the Norman, and in course of time English and Norman disappeared into the making of a subtly different Englishman. Suppose Germany conquered England and reduced Englishmen to an inferior status. . . ."

"They would n't submit to it."

"Whether they did or did n't, the end of a German occupation would be the evolution of a different Englishman. Something would be lost to him, but was it worth struggling for? Look at the Pole. He has scratched his itching national aspiration until it is a fever in his blood, destroying body and mind. Is it worth it? After all, what is the value to a people of the peculiar quality of its Being known as its nationality?"

"Exactly nothing," Kersent said bluntly. "As a matter of fact it simply does n't exist. There are no races or nations: there are only men and other men. Pride of nationality is an atavistic ghost blown into a seeming of vitality by the bad breath of politicians and self-seekers. Of course, if you look at them from one angle of vision, the peoples of the world fall apart into sharp, almost antagonistic groups. But if you look at them straight they'll sort themselves out in such a way that to find your spiritual kin, my dear Chamberlayn, I should probably have to hunt among the tribes of Central Africa, or somewhere else where they still worship fetishes and ju-ju men."

Jack became incoherent.

No doubt the spiritual brother of Erasmus Butterby lives in a mud kraal and knowing nought of broadcloth—"the best

broadcloth from the best mills, my boy"—decorates his paunch with beads.

But there are some disadvantages in viewing the races of mankind from the standpoint of spiritual kinship. I take the chiefest to be that there is so feeble a spirit in the worst of us and so variable a spirit in the best of us as to make nonsense of the saying, "There are no races and nations, but only men and other men." You have to multiply the individual human spirit by hundreds of his fellows before you get a spirit to juggle with at all. The spirit of the wild ox is something of a flicker: reinforced by the spirit of the rest of its herd it becomes a formidable flame. This is not the only analogy between men and oxen.

Even a nation of slaves may achieve something of distinction in its national manifestations of spirit. May even at times so pour into one man the suppressed fire of its aspirations as to light a beacon for the world. So with the Jews and Christ.

CHAPTER IX

ON the day of the declaration of war we met in the basement at Hammersmith. We had made no appointment with each other. Margaret and I had gone there to pack up our books and arrange for their removal. Shortly Kersent came in, and then Chamberlayn and Oliver together.

Outside the footsteps of the passers-by rang on the iron grating above the narrow area. They went with nervous speed, or shuffled languidly. I found myself listening to them, weaving patterns in their ceaseless rhythm. In the dim basement a leashed excitement drew us together. We sat round the place on packing cases and piles of newspapers. Kersent and Margaret went on methodically sorting out the books on the shelves while the rest of us talked. I do not know whether Chamberlayn realized Kersent's attitude to war. For some time he ignored Kersent and devoted his attention to me. I was putting up a half-deliberate pretense at hesitation. I hated to be rushed into anything, even into war, and I was quite ready to argue about it.

"Good God, man," Chamberlayn said, "you're not going to tell us it's not necessary to fight. We did n't ask for war, but now it's here it's got to be won. I know you're no shirker, but your mind's so full of kinks . . ."

"Somebody must have been asking for war," Kersent murmured. "You said Germany was preparing for it, France hoping for revenge, and your friend the brigadier expecting it. I daresay he faced the prospect with no undue horror, except at the thought that we were n't ready. Seems to me there's been a good many Sister Annes hanging out of turret windows looking for a cloud of dust."

"That's all very well," Chamberlayn retorted, "but it has nothing to do with us who are young. *We* did n't start it."

"When we know a little more about it, I daresay we'll find that it came out of the follies and sins of the past," I said.

"Devil take its beginnings," Chamberlayn cried. "Ain't it enough that we're faced by the danger of a German Europe?"

"Is it possible?" Kersent interrupted smoothly. "Whatever makes you suppose that there are fools in existence who dream of a European Kingdom? And even if it were accomplished and Germany dominated it, what difference would it make to the millions of us?"

He finished the packing of the last case, and seated himself carefully on the top of it. "You're not fools," he said slowly. "You don't really believe that the only statesmen who dream of turning the lower classes into well-bred slaves dwell on t'other side the Rhine and cry Hoch at the sight of sauerkraut. Every modern State is rotten and built on self-interest and greed. I wouldn't raise a finger to save one of them." He lifted his head and looked at Chamberlayn. "I might as well be frank about it. I don't intend to fight. I don't suppose they'd take me as a fighter." He shrugged his thin shoulders. "But there are things I could do. Only, I will take no part in war. I can't go over it all again."

Chamberlayn stared at him. "No part? What d'you mean? You can't help taking part."

"I can — and shall."

Chamberlayn got to his feet. I suppose that in that moment all the pent forces of his hatred of Kersent burst up and swept away his lingering consideration for Kersent's frailty. "You poor fool," he stammered. "Oh, you poor fool!"

He poured on Kersent a torrent of denunciation.

Interruption came unexpectedly. Margaret ran across the room and shook his arm. "Be quiet," she said. "We know your heart is in the right place, and your head is not quite hopeless, but you'll make us want to prove both in the wrong. Can't you see that we've none of us had time to think things out yet?"

"Oh, for pity's sake," he shouted, "don't let's think about it. If we think long enough we'll all be Kersents."

Margaret laughed at him a little wildly. "Yes, that's just you. You'll take any sort of risk, make any wild jump, consent to any patching up and hiding of rottenness — if only you're not asked

to take the trouble of thinking it out beforehand. You get irritated when you think. It's because you haven't thought deep enough. You've only scratched at your mind and irritated it. Kersent has thought deeply, but only in his own nature. He thinks Germans would all be Kersents if you gave them a chance."

"Eh!" said Chamberlayn. "What does it matter?"

A dull calm succeeded his outburst. He began searching for his hat. He found it and turned to Kersent.

"I've nothing more to say. You can sit here in your cellar. I don't know if I called you a coward just now. If I did I take it back and apologize for it. The mischief's in your mind. It's your mind I really loathe. You bloody Pilate!"

He went out and Oliver followed him.

"Are you coming?" I asked Kersent. He shook his head.

In the doorway Margaret hesitated. She walked back across the room, and stood beside him.

"We've not always been the best of friends," she said, "and I don't agree with you now. But if there's ever anything you want doing that I can do, you will let me?"

"Thank you," he said, without stirring.

We went out and left him sitting there.

I stood next day in the upper windows of a newspaper office in Fleet Street, watching while the khaki-clad companies went by. I think they were Territorials. They had their band, and the drums rolled in the distance. I tried to quiet the throbbing of my heart.

I told myself that it behooved every man to think out the question of his duty. Kersent had thought it out. We were surely past the days when men went blindly to fight in any war, caring nought for its injustice. I called up a scorn of my own emotion. The whole of my ancient distrust of a Butterby-approved Empire rushed to join itself to that scorn. I thought — "I'm damned if I'll run like a fool because drums beat and flags wave. I'll understand things first."

I went down into the street. There among the crowds standing along the pavement, I ran into Dora. He stood with his hands

in his pockets and his hat on the back of his head, smiling while other folks cheered. I had not seen him for months. He greeted me cheerfully.

"What sort of a feeling does military music rouse in you?" I asked him curiously.

"This sort of thing?" He waved a hand at the excited crowd. "Oh pity, chiefly—to think that there are so many fools in the world."

"It does n't make you want to rush off and join them?"

"Good Lord, no. Do you take me for a fool?" He flung back his head and laughed. "Fight? Me? Fight for a lot of bloody-minded capitalists? Fight for George and Mary? Not me. Give me a barricade across a street and something worth fighting for, and I'll fight, by God I will."

He nodded to a man crossing the road in the wake of the released traffic. "A man you ought to know," he said. "Landon. Landon of the 'Beacon.' He and I are starting a peace campaign right away." He introduced us. I had the curiosity to ask Landon to explain his point of view. But he and Dora were both so irritatingly sure that my intellect could not compass the heights and depths of their pacifist philosophy that I lost them in the crowd.

The conviction grew within me that my place was with Oliver and Chamberlayn. As in our Hammersmith experiment we had found it imperative to fly from thoughts to deeds, so now I turned instinctively to action. At the moment I did not care much on which side I was so long as it was not Dora's. And there for the present I left my reflections.

I do not know whether I went into the war to save my soul. It is a delicate question. Kersent remained at home to save his. He lost his life and I my eyesight. At any rate I have proved to my own satisfaction that the soul dwells not in the eyes. Kersent has been able to make the final test. Who shall say what he has proved and discovered?

I must have met Charlotte later on that same day, Charlotte of the T. P.'s Circle. I have a vague remembrance of talking to her in some café. A little sharper of feature, a little cloudier

of brain, a little more discontented was Charlotte. She said amazingly, "Well, if the Germans do conquer England, at least they will get plays like mine produced."

There was with her a fat and famous journalist, who fixed me with a satyric eye and said, "What does it matter whether this war be righteous or a madness? Better it were madness. The glory of the warrior is not in the justice, but in the injustice of the fight. That men should pour away life for a madness! The heroic age is come again! *ὦ Βάχαι!*"

CHAPTER X

I HAVE to record a gradual slackening of enthusiasm. In the early days of the war I easily persuaded myself that we were moving to that social unity of which we had imagined the faint stirring in our Brixton circle, in the art circles of Chelsea, in a dozen other side eddies of the national life. I believed that we stood at a place in the upward path of humanity where all those forces that drive man beyond the narrow circle of his egoistic sympathies were bursting into conscious life. Impossible that the chance would be missed. The tremendous winged forces that beat so blindly against the distrusts of class and sex and age would be set free, and like Pegasus, return to the hands of their masters and be guided through the stars. We should be a nation of brothers. A new age was being born, an age in which all the Ishmaels, rich and poor, would find their place in a commonalty of service.

Upon my word, I talked like Erasmus Butterby and never thought of him once.

To tell the truth, there was, during the first months of the war, a thaw in the ice barriers between class and class. It did not last. The barriers hardened again with astonishing rapidity. Beneath the much talk of unity, the old hostilities reared angry heads.

I gave up reading the "Beacon." It irritated me so with its futile pin-pricks of jealousy, and its whimper of remonstrance. I gave up looking to England to nourish a new state between her ancient breasts. After all, said I, states are not born like that.

I became absorbed in the efforts of individuals. For a long time I tried to keep in touch with Kersent. During the first year of the war he remained lecturing at King's. He read a paper to the Oxford Philosophical Society. He drew breath after his terrible struggle for the things that were life to him.

I do not think that the question of his views on war arose at all during this time. Certainly he never proclaimed them. In

one of his letters he wrote, "I wonder what Chadding would say if he knew my opinion of his patriotic eruptions. He said at a dinner last week that there was not, in the whole of German philosophy, one single doctrine that was more than a developing and a subtilizing of the howl of the wolf pack. I wish to God I had the courage to remind him of his book on Hegel wherein he compares that gentleman to a mountain whose head is veiled in the serene clouds and whose feet stand firm-rooted in the warm vibrant life of humanity. He has never asked me what I make of the war. I think poorly of myself for concealing my opinions from him. Indeed, I live in dread of the day when I can no longer conceal them. I dread most of all that I should find within myself the cowardice to deny them."

I wrote and told him that I saw no reason why he should proclaim his opinions. After that I heard from him no more, and on my next leave I went to look him up. I went to King's, and was told that he had left the college. I sought him next in Walthamstow.

He was there. The family had taken another room in the house where they had always lived. It was fitted up as a study and sitting-room for Kersent. His mother opened the door nervously and showed me in.

I was stricken with horror at Kersent's appearance. His face had taken on the aspect of a transparent mask. One could almost see the taut nerves straining in the emaciated body. He explained briefly that Chadding had asked him to attest under the Derby scheme.

"It was purely a matter of form, he told me. There would be no question of my joining the army even if I were accepted. Only, for the look of the thing, I must offer my services." Kersent paused, "By God, Hearne, I nearly attested." He laughed; I stared fascinated at the grotesque movements of his facial muscles. "However, I did n't. Chadding wanted to know why, and I told him. Oh, they did n't drop me right away. They reasoned with me. They tried to persuade me to offer my services to the Red Cross. Chadding said — 'My dear fellow, what on earth does it matter? You won't be accepted. You're not fit, and in any case, we should retain you here.' I believe it was

my obstinacy that irritated them. I resigned to save them the trouble of showing me the door."

The pity burned in my throat.

"Man," I urged, "why can't you take your share? You don't need to fight and kill. There are other ways of fighting."

A somber flame sprang into his eyes. "Why should I fight at all?" he said harshly. "Could the Germans do worse to me than my own countrymen have done? Am I to fight for the inestimable boon of having been born in fear, bred in misery, and starved all my life? Ask a pig to defend his sty."

"Don't you care at all for the ideals in peril?" I said desperately.

He laughed his thin, mocking laugh. "Ideals? You talk to me of ideals? Ideals that have produced *me*?" He beat his hands on his chest.

"Can't you look beyond yourself?"

"What shall I see when I do? A universal carnage in which you ask me to join."

We sat in silence until Kersent rose. "You'd better go," he said. "We have nothing to say to each other. Thanks very much for coming."

I had great ado not to run from the house to hide my anguish. "What are you doing?" I asked.

"Just at present, teaching in a preparatory school that happened to be in urgent need of teachers. I do not know what I shall do next."

In the outer room his mother cried as she went to open the door for me. "He was so happy," she whispered, looking nervously to see that Kersent had shut the door of his room. "He was so happy. Why could n't they let him be?"

A bent figure by the fireplace lifted its head and scratched at its wrinkled neck with long black nails. "Oh, ay, happy," Kersent's father said, "happy, as fools be happy. I told him. Now it's come to him."

The mother looked miserably from her husband to the closed door of her son's room. If it were not that men are so ridiculous, how could one bear their suffering?

I went looking for the saving grotesque and found Oliver.

CHAPTER XI

OLIVER had been discharged from the army with the loss of three fingers of his left hand and a slash down the side of his chest that will pain him all his life. I went up north that night to see him and my mother. He had joined the army as a private, and held my commission in unconcealed contempt. It was difficult to discover what he did not hold in contempt.

He strode about our small sitting-room, and talked in a voice of thunder against every aspect of modern life. He damned it root, branch and blossom. He said that our society was a swollen corpse, which, instead of producing bees produced horrible prying insects of politicians, and socialists, who were nothing but politicians out of a job. This charnel-house atmosphere he laid to the account of modern art.

"In the Middle Ages," said he, "art was not only instinct with life — it was a part of life. It lived, and men breathed it in with their common air. It spoke to them in furniture, in tapestries whereon saints are received into glory, and babies display their nakedness, and knights go hunting in the gay greenwood. It sang for joy in Churches, letting imps and devils and angels sport and sleep on its huge, jolly limbs. In the modern commercial age, art is an excrescence, at best a protest. It stands like Ruth amid the alien corn, and snivels until Boaz comes along with a check. It can have no part in an order founded on self-interest, for art is always disinterested. By that, I mean that its interests are as wide as the world and its forms as many as the forms of life. But if the forms of life are all twisted and ugly, what can art do but fly from them and build itself out over the air, held to the earth by as tenuous a thread as it can conceive? Futurism is the last and worst expression of this building out over the air. What the world's clowns, apes, fools — whatever you will — call Naturalism, is the horrible abortion that resulted when art attempted to join itself to modern life."

"What do you propose to do about it?" I interrupted weakly.

"Let me tell you. I am an artist. Under the circumstances there are only two courses open to an artist. He can either be a Walter Crane and join his art to the last living thing left in the modern world — the half-articulate, volcanic forces of the people's need. Or he can withdraw to the only mode of life that is still fit to give birth to art. I mean the life of nature. I shall be a laborer — a peasant. You haven't forgotten old Luke Pearson? I went to see him last week. I get a cottage and a pound a week to work for him, and I shall begin next month. By God, I'm going back to the moors and the fields that slope down to the valley and the wide meadows where the brown streams leap between the drooping beech trees. I'm getting back into life as into a garment. What a fool, what a fool I was ever to leave it off."

He threw his huge arms above his head, and the flames of his hair made him a halo of fire.

"You'll weary of it in a week," I said.

For the matter of that, he has not wearied of it yet, nor has my mother, who went with her Benjamin. I do not suppose that they will.

He took not the slightest notice of me now, but roared away in the clouds.

"Art and life are one and the same thing. Art is life in articulate song. Art is the rushing wind in the hair of life. Tear them apart, and both are maimed, sterile, artificial. The divorce of art and life is the root of evil."

Jove could not have been more inspired. I lit my pipe and had pity of Juno.

CHAPTER XII

ON leave in London, sometime in the winter of 1915, I wandered into a Bond Street café. The pinch of war was tightening on the poorer people, but the dainty, soft-shod women sat here and talked delicate rubbish in the uninflected monotonous drawl of refined speech.

"I said to young Harburn that the German women in England should be put on the land. On the land. Set to dig." She poked a slender white hand into the violets on her muff. "Harburn has the ear of the Home Office — the *ear*, my dear . . ."

A frail ingenue of thirty leaned towards a young officer who wore the ribbons of four decorations. "We shall never give in, shall we?" she lisped. "We shall fight to the last drop of blood and the last crumb."

He looked at her for a brief second before he said, "Of course."

I recognized old Lady Cricklewood, Jack Chamberlayn's maternal aunt. "I canteen at night," she boomed. "I do Red Cross charity work all day. I've given recklessly, recklessly, my love. And then they say that we of the upper classes do not realize the war, and are not taking our share." She lifted an impressive hand. "We are the only ones who do realize it. What can the working-man understand of the intricate, world-wide interests at stake? What is Imperialism to him?" She sank her voice to a thunderous whisper. "Of course, I know one should n't say it, with all this scandalous labor unrest about, but do you — can one indeed honestly believe that these people feel losses as we do? My nephew went back to the front last week. He seemed almost depressed, poor boy. I wrote to him and said — 'Fight on. God is with you. *We* are with you.' Ah, what a spirit is in the old stock."

I tried to shift my chair out of the range of her eye. She prided herself upon a memory for faces; I thought that she

might reach out a ponderous hand and pick me up to be questioned for the satisfaction of her cosmic insolence. The movement brought me violently against a small table set back in the corner. I jumped up to apologize to a girl sitting there, half-hidden by the curtains. Olive Champion turned her head. After a moment's sharp scrutiny she held out her hand. "How well you look," she said; "won't you sit here?"

I took the other chair, and wondered what I should say. She leaned back in her seat, and eyed me with a deliberate assurance.

"Have I changed?" she demanded.

"You are thinner," I said doubtfully.

"And older and wiser, and not so pretty." She laughed.

"Bones don't suit my type of beauty." And then abruptly — "Where's Mick?"

"Has n't he ——" I began.

"Now, don't pretend you thought he would have written to me. You knew he would n't as well as I did. Oh, don't think I care. I am long past that time. I'm curious."

"He's in Barbados," I said. "Chief assistant on an Agricultural Experiment Station. He has a salary of £350. He's doing brilliant work. He got his F.R.S. this year for his work on the diseases of cotton. Immunity of native cotton to Blister-Mite. One of these days he'll get his chance to make practical use of his knowledge — commercial use, I mean. He'll be rich perhaps. He has a white house, a pianola, and a bust of Beethoven." She would not smile, and I finished lamely, "He seems content. But then he might any day break away and leave things, as he did before."

She sat brooding, her head resting rather wearily on her hand. Then she said quietly, "He always said you could n't make money honestly in a world so ill-arranged. He said all rich men's hands were blood-stained."

"Perhaps it's different out there," I said weakly.

She looked at me with somber eyes. "It would n't be different anywhere for Mick. He's altered — or else he did n't mean the things he said. Perhaps he only went to get away from me."

A queer pity seized me. "I think you're wrong," I said. "He went because he could n't stand the life of a professional

scientist. It's a stupid life in England. Mick isn't made for such things."

I knew that I was talking nonsense, and I tried awkwardly to explain Michael to her. "You're wrong about him," I repeated. "He's a scientist. He's got to be a scientist. Only, here, things worried him and got at him. The meanness and harshness of life kept thrusting in upon his work . . ."

I don't think she listened to me.

"I did n't believe in him when he was here," she said slowly. "Since he went I've made myself believe in him. Not because of himself, you know. But I wanted to have something sure." She laughed loudly. "How mournful we're getting. We might be discussing a corpse. For pity's sake, let's try something a little more cheerful."

"What are you doing now?" I asked.

"I? Oh, just living. You wouldn't know, of course, that mother and father have separated. I live with mother, but it isn't all smooth going. Mother's quite happy; she has a man to take her round and buy her things." She grimaced, and leaned forward with an air of reckless candor. "Of course, I know what you all think of me — and of mother. But I'm not like that really. It's not good enough for me. I must marry. She would n't be sorry to have me out of the way. I shall do the best I can for myself."

She gathered up her furs, and we walked to the door.

"Where are you going?" I said.

"Home. I've been round the shops. Everything is awfully dear. This silly war. I'm going to the Palace to-night. I don't suppose we shall meet again." She gazed across the street, talking in an absent, jerky fashion.

I put her into a taxi.

"Where shall I tell him to go?"

She leaned forward suddenly. "Why is n't Mick fighting?"

"Oh. You didn't know. I forgot. He's lame. He got knocked about on that ship."

She started at that. "Lame? Mick? Oh, how strange. I think of him as so quick and eager. She settled herself against

the cushions. "Tell him — Belgravia, Eaton Terrace. Good-by. Good luck."

I never saw or heard of her again. I wrote and told Mick of the meeting. His comment was briefly characteristic. "Hope she marries well," he wrote. "I bear her no ill-will. And self-preservation is a law of immature life."

CHAPTER XIII

CHAMBERLAYN was killed a week later. He had trained as an airman. "Building my bridges in the air," he had it. He was skilful beyond the ordinary, and courageous in the common way of flying men. He held the D.S.O. when a German airman shot him down in his twenty-fourth year.

I was at breakfast when a man who had known him came into the mess and asked us if we had heard. Almost before I could take in the sense of his casual words, I had an instant and vivid vision of Chamberlayn. He stood in a darkened basement with his hands resting on the table, and explained the building of bridges to an odd fifty of tired, work-worn men. It was as if he stood at the other side of the narrow breakfast-table. Then the white cloth and the cups and plates came back, and shone where the lean hands had pressed bare scarred deal, and a khaki-covered shoulder blotted the stooping body back out of life. I suppressed my cry of greeting and farewell.

Death and friendship play so swift a game out there that when death wins there is small time for sorrow. It is an unkindly saying. But since the one player changes so often and the other never at all the game loses at last even the interest of a hazard.

I bore about with me for days a sense of loss that somehow excluded thought of Chamberlayn himself.

The old Duke went out a few months later. I saw him a week before he died. He was not ill, but he talked and moved like a man already emptied of life. I thought that he must have drawn his life from Jack, and was only waiting now for the touch that should crumple him into silence, a little dust at the end of four centuries of life.

I had just left the Duke when I ran into Tommy. I was walking aimlessly up Fleet Street. Anthony's train was due in two hours.

His leave and mine had fallen together for the first time, and we meant London to remember it.

Tommy had with her the little man who had given me cause for so much irritation and self-abasement in the early days of our Scheme. He had not forgotten me. He stared at my uniform. "The machine got you, I see." He made the remark with the air of a man who cannot take much pleasure in the spectacle of folly just because he has always known the fool to be — a fool.

"It did n't get you," I answered.

"I should hope not." He began to explain at once that he was not one of your snivelling Christians.

"I don't care a damn one way or another about fighting," said he. "I'd as soon fight as not, if it comes to that. But I'm out to smash the machine."

"The machine?" I queried hopefully.

He did n't think me worth the trouble of explanation. I suppose some one had been telling him that wars are arranged solely for the benefit of the rich, and although his knowledge of economics was confined to labor pamphlets he believed it, as he believed everything written in labor pamphlets.

He told me that he was coaching the slower-witted of his comrades for their appearance at tribunals. He had a gleeful sense that he was assisting at treasonable practices.

"Come and have some tea," Tommy said. "If you're not too good to be seen with the likes of us."

I was abject enough to rise to the taunt.

"There's a vegetarian place near, where we always go," she added.

We walked down four side-streets to a small, steamy room hung with reed mats, and full of the most horrible painted pots. Tommy led the way to a corner table. "This is my treat," she announced, and ordered three cups of some strange drink. It turned out to be a coffee substitute, unspeakably vile of smell, and abominable of taste. She eyed me unkindly while I sipped the treat.

The little man ate poached eggs and abused England. He seemed to hate England. No enemy accusation could have been

more bitter than his. He would not discuss the follies or crimes of any other nation, but he discoursed me with passion on the treachery, greed, and ingratitude of his own.

"When I was home on my last leave," I interrupted, "I saw some sailors brought ashore from a torpedoed tramp steamer. It was a bitter day, with a wind like a lash and a cruel sea. The men had taken to their boats, of course, and they had been fired on as they crouched there. Some were killed and some were wounded. The boat was beastly to look at. No worse than the trenches, of course, but the sea is man's common enemy, and it does n't seem decent to me to take sides with her in the way the Germans do."

He stared. "Our Navy does far worse things than that," he said, "but they don't get into the papers."

"You guzzling little beast," I cried.

He grinned. "Of course, if you will believe all you read . . ."

He did, but then he and I read different things. I suppose that neither of us considered the other's point of view worth the attempt at understanding. Moreover I had a sudden loathing of his loose-mouthed smile and general slackness of body. His neck wanted washing, and I sought a feeble relief in calling him a filthy blackguard. But that delighted him beyond measure.

"You must n't talk to Hearne like that," Tommy said maliciously. "He's simply bursting with national feeling."

The little man wriggled for joy. "There is no such thing," he said. "Take it from me — it's a newspaper dodge."

I opened my mouth to reply and shut it again. I should be a fool and mad to argue with him. If I let his attitude of mind annoy me, so much the worse for me. It had in reality no relation to the War. The War had not created him, nor even developed him. He was one of a class which exists, a menace and a shame, in every modern state. He was a slave, and half educated.

Quite suddenly I understood why he was so ready to talk, with his mouth full of poached egg, on the perfidy of the Briton and the glory of the German. Distorted out of recognition by its struggle against the bitter sense of wrong done him, the ancient

impulse to national pride yet stirred in him. Painfully, it was forcing its way to the surface of his mind in the form of a savage determination to find good in some alien nation — in any nation, so long as it were not the one that had starved and thwarted him all his life.

"You're only a Chauvinist upside down," I murmured.

"Eh?" he said, staring.

I pondered, in what Tommy would have called my crude fashion, whether at this stage of human development, one might expect to find faiths that have as yet small credit housed with most readiness and comfort in imperfect bodies. The hermits of the early Christian age clearly thought so; they spared themselves no rigors of mortification that could destroy the body.

"Have another cup?" Tommy said abruptly.

I tried to control my face. "Good God, no ——" I answered.

"You're awfully rude."

"I thought you liked to be treated as if you were a man."

"So I do. Why should n't I?"

"A man would n't have been offended at my reply."

"Neither am I," she cried shrilly. "You've no right to say I'm offended."

"I wonder why you are a pacifist," I said. "You're so remarkably belligerent." I knew that I was behaving disgracefully to my hostess. Hostess in spite of me, and to my grief. But I had suffered so much from the pair of them.

She fell into the trap and began an involved defense of pacifism from which I gathered that the intellectual position of the pacifist was too lofty to be comprehended by the non-elect and that the veriest fool ought to understand its inevitable commonsense and righteousness.

Clearly, thought I, she is immensely attracted and made envious by the intellectual arrogance of the pacifists she has met. She seemed to dread lest she should appear so far unintellectual as to be moved by sentiment. I think it was that prompted her remark — "Oh, my goodness, don't talk to me of noble mothers. They are all fools and deserve their grief."

I guessed at another and more potent reason for her attitude.

Consciously or unconsciously, she was jealous of the shadowed part that women play in war. She imagined that it threatened her longing for domination.

"I should never have forgiven Dora if he'd joined the army," she said, "never, never, never. For one awful week I thought he was going to. But luckily for him, his senses came back in time to save him. I'd have left him and never gone back to him again."

I believe she would. Instinctively, she was eager to do anything to prove her contempt for so masculine a business as war. She wanted to throw stones at the monster to compel recognition of her own importance.

Her instinct was perfectly trustworthy, of course. War is the enemy of all women.

But this woman did not hate war because it brought misery. She hated the warrior, the fighting spirit, and the fighting intellect. She loathed militarism as do all good men. But not for its genuine evils. She feared it and disliked it through that jealousy of what is distinctively male which all women have, but which she had in an abnormal degree.

"Of course, I don't pity the mothers of dead sons. Why should one pity wilful fools? They should have brought their sons up better. If I had a son and he joined the army I'd spit in his face."

Curiously enough, it was of no sorrowing mother that I thought, but of Jack Chamberlayn's father as I had just seen him. She had so much damned talk, and he was dumb, with eyes through which no spirit peered, staring upon a world that gave him back empty stare for stare.

"Since you don't ever intend to have a son," I said, "your fortitude is not likely to be put to the test, and your influence on the next generation may be taken as nil."

I repented the words as soon as they were out of my mouth, but I might have spared myself the trouble, for she hardly noticed them. And before she could answer me, her attention was caught by two people who had just come in and were looking vainly for an empty table.

She stood up and waved her spoon at them. "Mrs. Mannick,

Mrs. Mannick," she bawled. "There's room here. Come and sit with us. Heaps of room."

I turned my head. I had forgotten the name, but I could never forget the person. With smiles and fluttering of hands the two simple Christians approached our table. The man edged himself in beside me as he had been wont to edge into our rooms with his deferential smile for Margaret and his horrible, eager friendliness for us. His wife cut his greeting short. She looked at me once.

"You are in the army," she remarked. Thereafter she said no word to me, but many words and hard ones, at my degraded soul. I think she had persuaded herself that she hated war because her religion demanded it, but in very truth she ought to have blessed the chance that had broadened her hunting-ground. Her storehouse of unpleasant tales was pressed down and running over with new and startlingly foul stories of soldiers and women. She was like the man in the Scriptures who had to build himself new barns for his harvest. Her harvest simply could not be contained. She spilled it all over her conversation.

Her husband leaned heavily on Christ. It must have been a real relief to him to find a ground on which he could meet the Nazarene with no inward shrinking. "Will shed no man's blood," he murmured, and, "Given myself to Christ."

I cannot think comfortably of Mr. Mannick and his castrated Christianity. His Master might have forgiven him his helpless treachery; but I would I were a Turk to address him as "Dog of a Christian," by way of distinguishing him from honorable men who have professed his faith with less unction and more grace.

At first, catching in him some faint echo of Kersent's fanatical courage, I said to myself that he was actually tolerable. I compared him with the cocksure intellectuals on the other side of the table, and he found favor in my sight. But as he shambled on, drenching me in a blashy spirituality, I suffered a violent revulsion. I groaned inwardly—"Any kind of intellectual arrogance of any other kind of pacifist—anything—except this man's sentimental humility." I even turned for relief to his wife. She at least did not invoke divine authority for her anecdotes. She was in the middle of a mild one, a veritable lamb among

anecdotes, a Watteau-dream, a dew-emppearled innocent. "Every one knows," she finished solemnly, "that no officer ever goes into the trenches. They sleep in the daytime, and carouse all night. The poor men do all the fighting."

Credit me or not — it is all one to Hippocleides — but that is what she said. And she supplied details of the carousals.

I shrank within my uniform. "It is not really just to look upon this female as a pacifist," I reflected. "She is rather a human type, whom an accident of upbringing or religion has pitchforked into pacifism!" I became aware that she was waiting for me to answer her. "I suppose officers get their wounds throwing champagne bottles at each other," I said feebly.

Tommy giggled, and I burned with shame at the wretchedness of my effort at self-assertion. But I was oppressed by the thought that I should only be another fool among fools if I let myself fall into sarcasm or indignation, or even honest remonstrance.

A few minutes later I lost my temper. "Upon my word," I cried, "I'm damned if I see how you dare withdraw so placidly from the agony of this injustice of war — you with your talk of justice." I glared at the amazed Mannick. "War is not detestable just because Christ forbade it, but because it is a shameful frenzied waste of the healthy body and the fine mind and the courageous spirit. It won't be ended because you've talked at it and withdrawn from it. Nothing will end it except a just ordering of society. And justice will have to be fought for — did you suppose it dropped like manna from the beneficent capitalist? But your sort doesn't fight, either with body or spirit. The world will have to be re-made before wars will cease. You won't do that by giving yourself to Christ and going on the land to avoid military service, nor yet by retreating to Wormwood Scrubs lest you should be beguiled into tying bandages round immortal devils in khaki."

Mannick's dropped mouth was very irritating and a new indignation seized me. "Besides, you *can't* withdraw from your kind like that," I said savagely. "You are men. To refuse aid to one of them is to sin against your common humanity. I don't see how it can be forgiven you that you stood aside not only from the slaughter but from the suffering."

Tommy giggled again.

Mrs. Mannick got up heavily, and stretched a hand across the table. She removed the plate of cakes from her husband's very grasp, and said, "Eat one more and I'll not be answerable for the consequences. You'd better come away now."

He hid his disappointment with a Christ-like cheerfulness, and followed her out of the café.

Oh, wonderful woman, you were a dutiful wife and a conscientious mother. Your husband feared you and your sons called you meddlesome. Your reward is not here.

"Oh Lord," said Tommy, "Oh Lordy me. That just reminds me. I promised faithfully to go home and get tea ready, and kick things into their places a bit. Dora's bringing a man home to tea. They'll be there by now."

She pushed a shilling into my hand, and hurried out of the café, leaving me to pay for the nauseous meal. I walked after her, and caught her up just as she was climbing on to a 'bus.

"Here's your shilling," I called. "I don't want the thing."

"Keep it." She leaned over the top of the 'bus as it moved off. "Kersent's dead," she screamed. "Did you know? Died yesterday in prison."

I looked round to find the little man at my elbow, grinning maliciously. "They murdered him," he said complacently.

I could have knocked him into the gutter. "Oh, you fool," I stammered, "you fool. You were n't fit to clean his shoes."

I turned and ran along the Strand, leaving him gaping after me.

CHAPTER XIV

ANTHONY began to chant at the top of his voice: —

The naked earth is warm with Spring
And with green grass and bursting trees,
Leans to the Sun's gaze glorying
And quivers in the sunny breeze.

"I'm sorry, dear old thing. I spoke in my haste. When I crawled out of my cellar yesterday morning I found a whole bed of violets. I've brought you three in my pocket book to prove it true."

We pushed our way along the platform, talking against each other.

I sat on the bed in the room I had engaged for him, and watched while he emptied his bag on the floor in a frenzied search for Georgian poets.

"Some fool sent me that," he said, holding the volume between finger and thumb. "Aren't people at home extraordinary? I shall make a present of it to some one."

"Don't you carry books?" I asked.

"Oh yes, a few — my Malory . . . Oh, and did I tell you? Our G. S. O. I. is a man of one book — the 'Morte d'Arthur.' Every night after dinner he lugs it out and reads in it until he goes to bed. One day, in the course of a little quiet boasting, I made mention of my own copy. He asked me what edition it was, and I said Caxton's, at random. Whereupon he proved to me by internal evidence that it could not possibly be. Afterwards, thinking he'd depressed me too severely, he said — 'You'll never be a scholar, my friend, but for your encouragement I'll admit you have the makings of a soldier.'"

I laughed. "What sort of a Mess have you? I never saw a Staff in its hours of ease."

"Signs of the times," said he. "In a Staff Mess of eight people, the 'New Age,' 'New Witness' and 'New Statesman' "

are on the side-table every week. And the General looks graver and more puzzled all the time. There's a war on, of course, to distract our minds — and Heaven knows they need distraction after reading the home newspapers. Look here, did I ever give or lend you my 'Spirit of Man'? My stock of quotations is getting low." He went across the room to look out of the window. "Oh, London! We didn't know how well off we were in the old days. I'm not taking away the palm from a few other places on earth, you know. 'In the Highlands, in the country places, Where the old plain men have rosy faces.' Hills and the sea. Snow in the pine woods and birch glens running down to the sea. Streams and waterfalls."

"I've seen the Duke, and Kersent's dead," I said abruptly.

Anthony wheeled round. "Oh," he said. And then — "I never thought he'd die. He didn't expect to die."

"How do you know that?"

"I had a letter about him." He rummaged afresh among his things. "Margaret wrote. She'd been to see him in prison. Here — read it."

I put it away in my pocket.

"I'll read it later," I said.

"Eh, but I'm sorry," he added. "He was no coward. But I've seen human nature very undisguised this last month, and do now believe that only one man in a hundred is not a hero, and that ninety-nine in a hundred are fanatical fools."

He was silent for a few minutes and then laughed.

"A funny thing happened the other day. You know there's a movement on foot to interest officers and men in social study with a view to simplifying adjustments after the war. The spirit of the thing is all right, but it's being run by generals and padres and people who have still to learn the rudiments. I say it's dilettante, and had better be run by omniscients from the School of Economics and sic-like people. I proposed a systematized education of padres and generals by the Central Labor College, and one red-faced High Priest got up and said — 'You're little better than an Eikonoklast.' Truth will out, you see." He chuckled with delight. "Who told you Kersent was dead?" he asked suddenly.

"Tommy. I met her this afternoon.

"The volatile Tommy. What's that husband of hers doing? Is n't he in prison? Perhaps he'll die too."

"He's not in prison. He's exempt so long as he stays at his work. Tommy says he's going on the land—got a Quaker farmer to take him on as a carter or something. I don't know how, but that's saved him. The Mannick goes with him."

"And Kersent dead in prison."

Late that night when I was alone, I took Margaret's letter out of my pocket and turned the pages awkwardly. There was a good deal about Kersent, but I do not remember all.

"I went to see if there was anything I could do for him," she wrote. "He seemed glad to see me. I imagine that in some queer way it is a relief to him to be in prison. I suppose he feels that he has reached rock-bottom and can drop no further. He is full of plans. 'After the war, I shall be needed to rebuild,' he said quietly. 'I could have been building now while the rest of you are destroying, but it is no matter, after all. I don't mean that I shall go into labor politics: I don't want to be paid for special pleading. The world seems to have caught a malicious madness. Anything of good is just now far more likely to fail than to succeed. I have n't an idea how near we are to revolution, but I feel that anything may happen.' He is gnawed by a lack of companionship—yes, even Kersent, who seemed to live so isolated a life when he had friends round him. There are plenty of conscientious objectors in the prison, but he has only dislike and contempt for them. 'Most pacifists,' he said, 'are utter fools in everything else. They are all too intent on saving their own souls to care about making the world fit for other men: So long as they refrain from killing they think they are entitled to sit in the deep that covers them and stroke their unconquerable souls.' I told him of Chamberlayn's death. He showed no surprise. 'I expected him to die,' he said calmly. 'If he had not been killed, he was still dead. There was nothing of him growing. In reality he died years ago. He had nothing to give to life. Men like that make a great show of vigor: they

run madly into blind alleys and beat their heads on walls. They accomplish nothing.'

"Afterwards he said, 'I am filling my days with reading about engineering and scientific work — which seems to be the only kind this miserable race does well. Some of the tunnels and bridges and things are wonderful. Only, it is all mixed up with war and the things that make for war. And yet I believe sometimes that the chemist and the engineer hold the key of the future.'

"I could not help wondering what had turned his thoughts to the work and the ambitions that so intrigued poor Jack, whom he despised. And yet Jack Chamberlayn, dying in No Man's Land under the wreckage of his machine, knew something that Kersent did not. Kersent sacrificed himself on the altar of an unattained perfection, but the other knew that it is sometimes imperative to fight for the second best, undeterred by its imperfections.

"I thought that Kersent looked wretchedly ill. I asked him if he were all right. He shrugged his shoulders and said, 'Oh well, I can't eat the food they give me. It's not that it is really bad — many of the men here are better fed than ever they were before. My mother has spoiled me for ill-cooked, ill-served food. I shall be all right. Chamberlayn died, but I shall live. The world has need of me.' I thought he talked like a man shouting in an echoing cavern. He said something about moral courage. Unconsciously, he seemed to draw a distinction between the immoral bravery of the soldier and the moral bravery of his own position. I was almost amused to see that the shield of Henry Arthur Kersent's irony was not so impenetrable that he could go untouched by this insinuating vanity."

I folded the letter and sat thinking, with my head pressed against the window. The great buildings lay hunched in the darkness like beasts asleep. A squat shadow with a low line of houses on either side was a vast shoulder with menacing arms and closed fists. I pretended to myself that the future lay in those shut hands.

Chamberlayn had died, Anthony was a V.C. and a Staff Captain, Oliver a peasant with a golden tongue. I shook with laughter. "God, what a queer crowd of friends are mine! When the ghost of Chamberlayn comes back to see us, does he prefer the Staff Mess or the laborer's cot? Have you no warning for me, old ghost? Good, kind ghost of my friend."

CHAPTER XV

I WROTE those last words a week ago, and have not found it in my heart to add to them. I have written nothing, but I have thought a little about the fools who gathered round me, poor fool, in that detestable café.

The conjunction of war and Mr. Mannick, and of war and the malicious little man whom I did not kick into the gutter, raises questions unconnected with the villainy of the Central Empire. When war is loathsome why do we not all sit in a café and exchange sad tales of old, unhappy far-off things?

I cannot think that the question is answered by assuming the inferior spirit or the superior intelligence of Dora and the little man whom I wish I had kicked into the gutter.

I loathe war and Mr. Mannick with equal fervor. Can it be that I loathe Mr. Mannick because he is so godly?

Something of the discredit incurred in the stoning of the prophets must be laid to the account of the prophets. The incident of the children and the bears may be extreme, but Elisha is not the only ill-natured man of God with whom it has been impossible to live in amity.

It is probable that the contempt with which I had been treated rankled in me — and the coffee substitute. I had not merited either. But the pacifist who assumes, as he usually does, the transcendant superiority of his intellect, has frequently the punishment he challenges: he is misunderstood. It is hard to be just to a man who is blatantly convinced that you cannot appreciate his position because it is too high for you. Even Kersent was inclined to pose himself and Life as matched antagonists.

He took up an attitude, as if life were somehow static, a changeless attribute to be predicted of all animate things.

The thought of Kersent brought me up short. I might kick the lay figure of Dora off the stage and come again with joy,

but what good did that while the other remained, smiling his ironic smile, unshaken and remote?

Kersent dead was a deathless challenge. Living, he could be ignored and his prison walls no less. He sat in prison, a secretive spider, hiding within himself his justification and his future. Like his, my mind, leaping walls and years, could see him already in the quiet times, pardoned and honored, guarding his racked heart with irony, lest he should have pity or gratitude of the men he could neither hate nor love even while he labored for them.

He had died and taken with him alike his justification and his future. He wrapped himself in death as in a cowl, and mocked, saying, "I remain unjustified, and ye also."

In my first lonely weeks in this place I saw him constantly. He came always as at that Eikonoklast meeting when the other rushed in with his talk of war. He dragged his dingy basket-chair into my room and sat himself down with me, his fine hair straggling over the cushions and his burning eyes fixed on the eyes behind my blindness. And there he talked of life and the value of life. A dead man glorifying Life. "After all," I said to him once, "in an age when men are pouring out life like water you did but remind them that they were destroying that which they could not create. Only, strange fate, you had to pour away your own life to do it."

And yet I could never bring myself to credit even Kersent with a greater share of moral courage than that in ordinary demand from the soldier. The circumstances of Anthony's V.C. were vivid in my mind. The war has revealed Anthony, releasing him. The skilled phrase-maker became a skilled officer: the imperturbable student a brilliant man of action. If it takes a brave pacifist to stand in a pit without crying, it takes precisely the same sort of courage to hold a redoubt with a handful of men for four days and four nights, to marshal your inadequate forces so skilfully as to repulse all attacks, to be witty on half a biscuit and the prospect of immediate annihilation, and to impart to your comrades the deathless spirit of your own endurance.

While I thought of Anthony the pity I had never felt before for Chamberlayn was released in a whelming flood. I was sick

at heart for the young limbs destroyed, the striving brain shattered, ambitions unfulfilled, hopes unopened, the life he was so eager to live taken away — a half-tasted cup.

I understood that it was with these men that I contrasted Dora of the slack body and the unjoyous smile. It is inevitable but that the contrast will be made. It is responsible for the lean, horrid, hairy pacifist of my obstinate imagination.

Mick has written me from his Agricultural Experiment Station. I have had the letter read to me twice and its phrases are tossed at random in my mind. "No one but you," he wrote, "can imagine what it has meant to me just now — this cursed lameness. I have come to hate the very blueness of this sea: I stare at it with a heart-sickening longing for the gray north seas. I make every kind of fool of myself. A British destroyer came wandering through these waters a few weeks ago and I tell you that tears came into my eyes. I half killed one of these damned Danes for abusing the English Navy. Yes — I — Michael Hearne — scoffer at parochial jealousies! The sight of that gray British boat set the blood leaping in my veins. God, I could have fought the whole world for England . . .

"You've a lot to say about Kersent. Well, as you know, when we were at King's I more or less worshiped old Kersent. I can hardly believe he's dead: he was such an indomitable blighter. He was worth ten of Chamberlayn — spiritually speaking. But my sympathies are all with Jack and 'My country right or wrong'.

"Kersent's ideals lit him as a torch is lit. Why didn't they get hold of my imagination, and yours, and Anthony's, and Chamberlayn's? . . .

"I've thought of those *other* savages that spilt the blood of human sacrifice over their land to ensure its fertility. And Christ spilt Himself — a sacrifice to His own ideal. Half the world gathered *that* harvest. And now Englishmen who call themselves followers of the same ideal have scattered its tenets to the winds — to ensure our national freedom, whatever that may mean. I don't know what it means: it's mixed up in my mind with the unreasoning affection I felt for that ugly gray boat.

"I suppose it's just that unreasoning feeling lifted us from the beasts that perish, fighting only for lust or interest. I wanted to fight for *England*. I'd have fought any damned nation. And that's all wrong, you know . . .

"It's a Janus feeling. One side of me remembers only the tale of our island virtues and reflects jealously on their glories. This is what your intellectuals call preserving-respect-for-national-self-determination. You remember how our grandfather resented interference with his domestic chastisements, which were appalling, because by God, a man must be judge of his own household's needs, or where, by God, would meddling end?

"The other side — well, I'm damned if I know what the other side is like. The voice is the voice of Mr. H. G. Wells, but the hands are closed and so may the eyes be for all I know . . .

"If I live until my brain has shrivelled like a dried pea in an empty pod, I shall never stomach Kersent's love of Humanity. How the devil can a man feel for a universal mush! But I suppose the same impulse that drove us to a national vision may push the boundaries to the world's rim. Or would that be the old Napoleonic madness? . . .

"It's quite certain that Jack Chamberlayn never thought of a World-State. In some fashion, fumbling or confident, he only thought that he ought to fight for the English ideal of governance lest a worse be put in its place. But he did n't fight for the slums with their starved and verminous children. He did n't fight to keep millions of his fellows on the edge of a scrambling respectability, cowed and coarsened by the insecurity that dogs them from birth to death.

"It will be dark in a few minutes. You never saw a Southern night. It's wonderful, of course, but I'd sell all its silly stars just once to lie face downwards on an English moor and smell the peat, and the acrid bracken . . ."

Michael is right. Chamberlayn did not think of hunger and misery when he thought of England. He thought of a State upheld by free men, meting out an equal justice, demanding from all men service and giving in return some beauty, the grave delight of responsibility and the peace of a secure life.

There is no such State. He and his comrades, whether they knew it or not, died for a dream.

If an archangel were to descend in Piccadilly Circus and bring to pass the scrapping of all armaments, the sinking of the navies, the demolition of the munition works, and the conversion to brotherly love of their owners and admirers there would be no more war. The radiant vision for which the airman died would leap into reality. Alas, the gods do not work like that; the last trump may be a penny whistle after all. He will not come, that healing angel, and in his stead, do you suppose that Dora will be equal to the occasion? . . .

During the first days of the war I made a great pretense of arguing its justice. And the outcome of it all, the foredoomed outcome, was that I flung myself after Chamberlayn and Anthony, afraid only of being left with Dora and Mr. Mannick.

What does it matter to me now? I shall not live to see which fought best for the World-State of their fumbling imaginations, Kersent dying in prison for his unmanageable desires, or Chamberlayn dying for the cracked, imperfect reality.

What does it matter to me? My faith, how lonely I am.

CHAPTER XVI

MARGARET came yesterday. She came up the path as I took my Golden Treasury from its wonted place. I knew her step, and I heard her voice when my good landlady opened the door.

She seemed to hesitate on the threshold, and then she came and stood before me.

"I would have come before," she said, "but there were so many things to do."

This seemed to me so strange an explanation of her three months' silence that I stood stiffly and found nothing to say.

"I might have written, but I did not know who read your letters." Her voice faltered. I held out a hand. Then in a moment I had her kisses on my eyes and mouth. I stood dry-throated in the tide of love.

"I can't see you," I said.

"Oh," she cried, "it does n't matter how old I get, or hard, you will see only youth."

I held her hands — wings that quivered to be free.

"Why have you come, and why have you stayed away?"

"My uncle is dead," she said simply. "He was ill for six weeks. I could not come before. There were things to do. I did not want to leave you again. I wanted to stay near you until we can be married."

"You can't stay," I answered dully. "Are you very rich now?" I was like a child that tears curiously at a toy and weeps for its destruction.

She laughed gently. "I could n't have come and lived on your pension," she murmured, and then, "Joy, heart of mine, don't you want me now? I am yours. Don't you understand? The money is n't mine to spend on me, or on our two selves, or even on our children. It's got to be spent well. Who can guide my hand but you? What does it matter, oh my dear?"

"You won't regret?"

"I regret nothing — not even the past."

While she rested in my arms, my mind sought to see itself in a hundred things. I thought of a bird's cry, far-off and high and shrill: of a giant ash that stood alone on a hill, and mocked with Odin at the innocent sky and the young weak gods: of a note struck by the careless wind on the first beech trees, caught up and shaken, blown with a million hurrying echoes, until the whole forest shudders with its mysterious and triumphant pæan: of a star that rushed between the knees of the universe, and stood in the dome of the sky. My life swung to a point, crying with bird, mocking with ancient tree, chanting with forest branches; filled with the intolerable radiance of the star, it swung and rose and made itself one with a sound more thin and piercing than light, and a light rolling round the universe like sound.

I pressed my face against her breast. I could think that I saw her, so sharply strove my spirit, a bird fluttering behind closed doors . . .

In the late afternoon we took our way to the forest whose first sparse trees are on the hill behind the house. Fallen leaves crackled under our feet, and small creatures of the wood scurried on either hand. As we went deeper into the forest the trees closed round us like the cloak of a watchful god. We climbed the slope of a small rounded hill, stepping between the roots of the trees. The top was sunken, and our feet pressed into the thick bed of leaves, covered with the fine pine needles. We sat there, and when I turned my head a warm band lay across my eyes. "The sun is passing behind us," I said. The spear of the dying god thrust between the trees its lucent point. When that lowered and was gone, and the forest murmured round us like a murmuring verge of foam, I asked, "Is it too dark to see your book? Read me something."

She turned the leaves as at random. "Earth hath not anything to show more fair." The dear voice stopped. "Oh, it is too dark. I cannot see to read."

"No, it is not dark. The forest is still awake."

"I cannot see."

"Lift your head from my arm then, and look, oh wilfully blind."

The myriad small scents of earth and dying leaves mingled with the scent of her hair. I held a strand of it across my eyes. I touched the cool throat and small, rounded breasts beneath the thin gown. "Are you wife of mine?" I whispered.

"Oh, love of yours, body of yours, yours, yours."

Ripples of life flooded out from our narrow couch — out through the green waves of the forest, further and wider, wide as the world, troubling with faint eddy the shadowed star-girt space. Thin sounds woke round us in the cloistered night, like lithe, half-witted things who ran and leaped in the morning of the forest that hid this forest in its womb. Cloven-hoofed and hairy, they peered with bright eyes. The sunken couch that knew our joy knew theirs.

Peace folded round our limbs. We lay still, sunk in the deep wood that filled the night with tracery of shafts and spars. A wind came from the empty downs, and went out across the world. Far-off and high and shrill, a peewit wheeled, crying, in the empty sky. All the earth was loosed of life and silence held empery.

"Margaret."

She said no word, though her lips moved under mine.

"Margaret: you have taken life and hid it between your breasts. The world is dead till you return to it."

I lifted her to her feet, and held her while she plaited her hair.

"My fingers shake," she said, and laughed softly to herself.

I took the plaits and fastened them round her head. We walked slowly along the path that widened as we went. A moment we stood with the forest behind us, and then descended towards the valley that waited far below.

CHAPTER XVII

AS Margaret reads over these papers for me, I find them full of bitterness against something I have called prejudice. It seems to me that whereas I was once sure of what I meant by the word, I am now uncertain and hesitant.

There will always be prejudice. Faiths arise and die, and their empty husks are tended by the kindly hands of prejudice and their memories cherished in its fierce heart. Then comes youth with the hammer of Thor, and tramples on hands and heart. And in its turn, youth grows old.

It may be that an ancient prejudice, being frail and polite, is least harmful. The prohibitions of the old code have so little hold on youth to-day that they permit it a scarred freedom. It troubles me that I cannot find even that altogether good. Suppose restraint — prejudice — were necessary to the hardening and sharpening of youth?

But one cannot think like that, or nothing would be done. After all, we do what we must.

If a man could destroy within himself the bitterness of prejudice, its jealousy, its savage need to force all other men to worship its gods and enjoy its joys, it would be better with him. To train oneself to understand and to respond would be to rob prejudice of its sting.

This was to have been, before all, a happy book. Somehow, in the writing of it, the happiness has slipped through my fingers and become small — so very small on the highroad of life. Is that the reality?

I do not believe it. I have but to close one door in my mind and open another. But to pass through, and shut it behind me. There, in a red-walled room, Margaret kneels on the floor before her bookcase. Now and then she brings an odd book to the fire-light to read the title. She smiles down at me as she passes. She spends a good part of her leisure tidying her bookshelves, and jealously rescuing books that have strayed into our shelves. Michael is offering her affectionate sarcasm on the habit. The

others are there, each in his favorite place, young and untroubled. I, alone of all of them, know that the door against which Oliver is leaning, opens on to roaring, illimitable space. The windows rattle in the wind and the rain clatters against them. "Good thing those windows are stout," Mick says. "The way the wind sweeps up this road."

And only I know that it is not the storm but the years beating on them in vain. . . .

Kersent taunted me once that I achieved mental ease by heaping up words and words. I do not at first understand why I should have thought of that just now. Then I remember that last night I dreamed of Kersent. I opened my eyes and seemed awake. Yet even in my dream I knew I could not be awake, else should I have wakened in darkness. But in my dream I saw the furniture of a bedroom, and an open casement window set high in the wall. I lay in bed, looking through it at the fiery ripples of dawn, widening in the sky. A figure came between them and me. Kersent stood at the foot of my bed. At his right hand a young owl balanced itself on the wooden rail.

"Why have you come?" I asked.

"Only to greet you. We both fought and died."

"I am not dead."

"You are a prisoner behind bars."

"Tell me," I said, "do you think now that you were right to keep out of the battle—you with your brotherly love?"

He laughed, the ghost of a laugh that died before the god of mirth was born. "Your words mean nothing," he murmured. "No man ever had a brother of his own kind. His brothers are the wind, the hills, eagles, rats—anything on earth but other men."

"Then what are men?"

"A dawn-brood of birds, that are dead i' the sun. How should I know?"

I cried out in involuntary protest, but he was gone and I struggling to wake.

Just as I finished breakfast, my landlady came into my room. She put something into my hand, something warm and soft, that moved in my grasp, thrilling me queerly.

"'T is a baby owl," she said. "We found it in a corner of your bedroom."

I must have heard it crying as I slept.

Kersent's words remained. All my life I have been vaguely aware of a spirit in me that is alien to my human kind, that responds to sudden half-comprehended calls, and remains obstinately dumb to the spirit in other men. It cuts me off from them. When I could see men, my eyes deceived me that I touched them and had intercourse with them. Now that the tricky glass is broken, I understand that it was shadows I called and shadows answered me. The spirit in me waited, always hesitant and afraid, behind the threshold of my thought. It waited, burdened by its very longing to respond.

There had been times when it leaped in the shadows like a babe unborn. When, as a boy, I came suddenly upon the lights of the town, gleaming in the hollow. The man less often knew that ecstasy. But once on a storm-threshed rock, and once in a forest, surely my spirit had leaped to touch another.

I wondered abruptly if the forces of alienation would grow more powerful as I grew old. A terrible gulf opened in front of me. I turned from it, shuddering and sick at heart.

Margaret, coming lightly along the passage, opened the door. For some reason she did not cross straight to me. Something like terror seized me. "Margaret," I cried.

She came quickly and seated herself beside me on the couch. She drew me back so that I lay in her arms. "My dear," she whispered. "Oh my dear, my lover." Her hand caressed my hair. I laid my head against her breast and the warmth of her body comforted me.

In a little while I was ashamed of my inexplicable anguish. Was I a sick man or a child to be running for comfort? I held her in my arms and she was silent under my kisses. A fierce, perilous joy thrust into me, a sword into the scabbard of my body.

The happiness I have had I offer gladly to life, a votive gift. The dappled road runs behind and before me, and the wind tears apart the crying trees. Life is a good horse for youth to ride, and death a good ostler, whoever may keep the Inn.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE BROTHERHOOD OF MAN

Man that is brother to the beasts,
The witless beasts that leap,
May well be kin to thrusting grass
And the round sky's wanton sweep:

To stars that whirl in fire o' nights,
To thorn's sparse blossomings,
To fields earth-fast on western slopes
And roaring fiddle strings.

May brother be to hornéd Pan,
But alien ever unto man.
Man, ringed in iron loneliness,
Stalketh the earth in haughtiness,

Then in a narrow cell regretteth day,
Becometh brother to his own decay.

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